PLANTING IDEAS • BEAUTIFUL GARDENS • EXPERT ADVICE

GARDENS ILLUSTRATED

Winter wonders

Crisp lines and frosted topiary in magical English gardens

POPS OF COLOUR

Top indoor orchids and how to grow them

FESTIVE DELIGHTS

Simple natural decorations and garden gift ideas

ON THE LEVEL

Expert tips: How to cope with a slope

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Welcome

JOHN CAMPBELL

It may be cold outside, but we can still embrace the subtle magic of winter in the garden – with a little help from cosy coats, warm socks and boots, of course. This issue, we visit several sensational seasonal gardens full of quiet beauty, with strong structural elements such as crisp topiary shapes, all sparkling with frost.

At Sissinghurst, head gardener Troy Scott Smith shares how he and his team spend their time over winter (page 34). We discover how Helmingham Hall in Suffolk is now under the care of a new generation of guardians (page 52), and the genius of Parsonage Farm garden, with its elegant geometry that emerges most vividly at this time of year (page 72). And for a little ray of sunshine, there's a new garden in Mallorca designed by Tom Stuart-Smith full of resilient, drought-tolerant planting (page 82).

There is also plenty of planting inspiration for the colder months, with Lowther head gardener Andrea Brunsendorf's top plant picks for December (page 14); and the best moth orchids to grow indoors to bring a flash of floral colour into your home (page 62), plus expert care advice.

Elsewhere, we find out how gardening is better exercise than the gym (page 80) and get designer tips for dealing with a sloping site (page 92). And just in time for the festive season, there are three elegant but easy-to-make natural decorations with floral artist Bex Partridge (page 44); the chance to win all 14 of our best gardening books of the year (page 105); and our bumper Christmas gift guide with ideas for every gardener (page 23).

Stephanie Mahon

STEPHANIE MAHON, EDITOR

ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Fill your home with everlasting flowers this Christmas with some simple but clever ideas from Bex Partridge, page 44.

ONLINE THIS MONTH

Find lots more festive inspiration and ideas for decorations, food, plants and presents on our website. Scan the QR code or go to **gardensillustrated.com/christmas**

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Facebook @gardensillustrated

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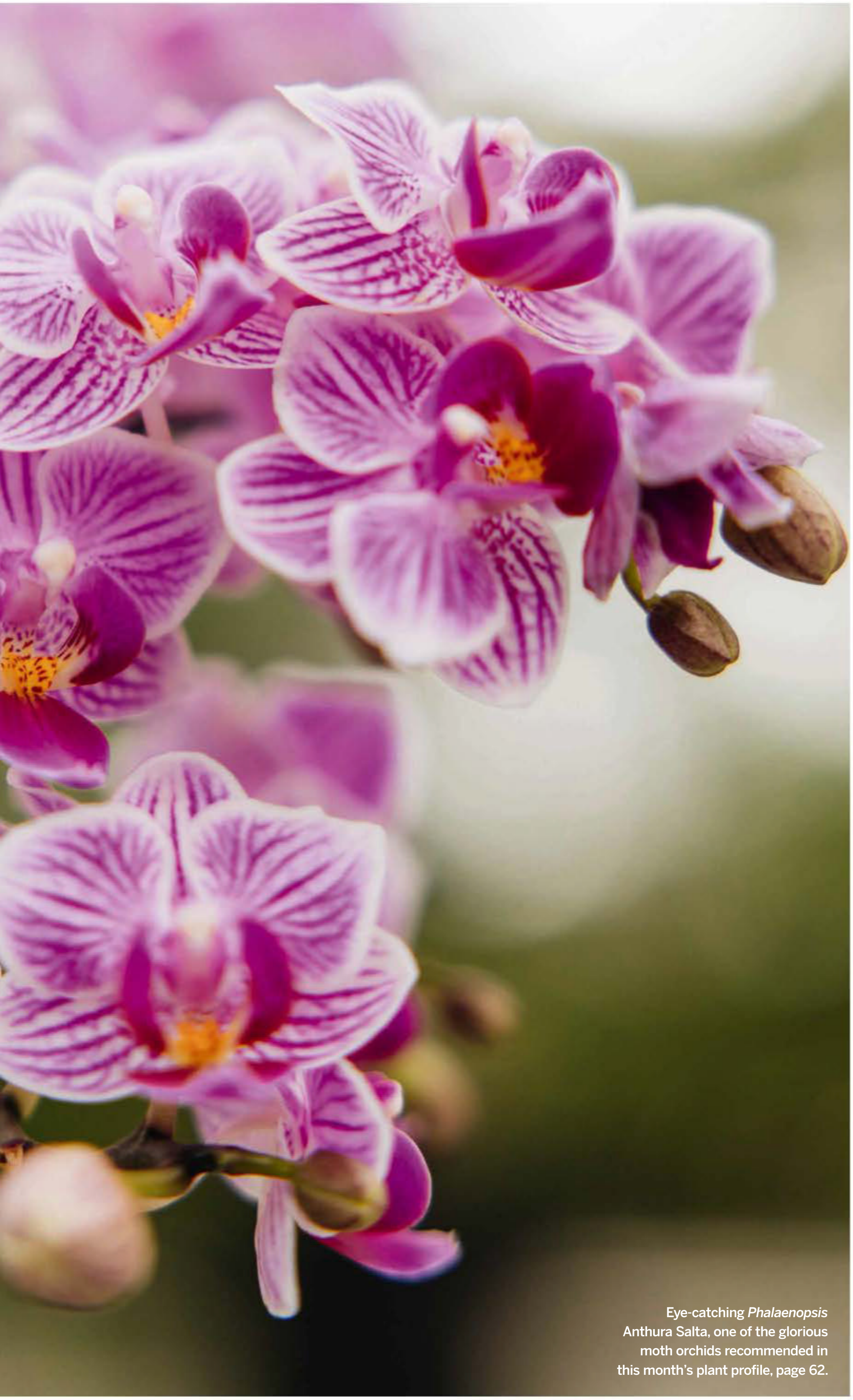
ÉVA NÉMETH



Eye-catching *Phalaenopsis* Anthura Salta, one of the glorious moth orchids recommended in this month's plant profile, page 62.

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SEE PAGE 20

COVER IMAGE

Parsonage Farm in West Sussex. Photograph by Bennet Smith (page 72).

ON THE COVER

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EVENTS AND OFFERS

- Save 50 per cent on the shop price when you take out
- Save money when you subscribe to the digital edition of *Gardens Illustrated* * – page 20
- Win all 14 of our books of the year choices† – page 108

† Competition open to UK readers only

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Design: Craig Atkinson

GARDEN DESIGN TRAINING FOR PROFESSIONALS

“I appreciated the interaction with fellow designers and being able to share our experience. AG

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CAIN OBA SMITH

Bex Partridge
Floral artist Bex shares ideas for natural Christmas decorations, page 44. *“From seedheads to ethereal flowers, you can achieve so much with what nature has to offer us.”*

Errol Reuben Fernandes
Errol explores a garden in Mallorca, page 82. *“Gardens like this that gently elevate the natural elegance of a place rather than imposing on them will always captivate me.”*

Carrie McArdle
Carrie visits a garden in West Sussex with strong winter structure, page 72. *“I know this garden well and love its scale and vision. It takes you on a journey and always surprises.”*

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ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Charlotte Harris
Charlotte co-founded the values-driven landscape design practice Harris Bugg Studio with Hugo Bugg in 2017. She has won three Gold medals at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, as well as Best Show Garden in 2023.

Fergus Garrett
Fergus was appointed head gardener at Great Dixter by Christopher Lloyd in 1993 and is now CEO of the garden’s Charitable Trust. He was awarded an RHS Associate of Honour in 2008 and an RHS Victoria Medal of Honour in 2019.

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James lives in the South of France where he runs Scape Design, a practice for creating sustainable landscapes. The winner of four Chelsea Gold medals, he was awarded Best Show Garden in 2017.

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Anna was *The Independent*’s gardening correspondent for 30 years and is the author of the bestselling book *The Tulip*. In 2000 the RHS awarded her the Veitch Memorial Medal. She lives and gardens in Dorset.

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Dan is one of the UK’s best-known garden designers. Among his many award-winning gardens is the Tokachi Millennium Forest in Japan. He was awarded an OBE in the 2022 New Year Honours for services to horticulture.

Sarah Price
Sarah is one of the UK’s most sought-after garden designers. She won Gold at Chelsea in 2012, 2018 and 2023, and was GMG Garden Columnist of the Year in 2016 for her design series in *Gardens Illustrated*.

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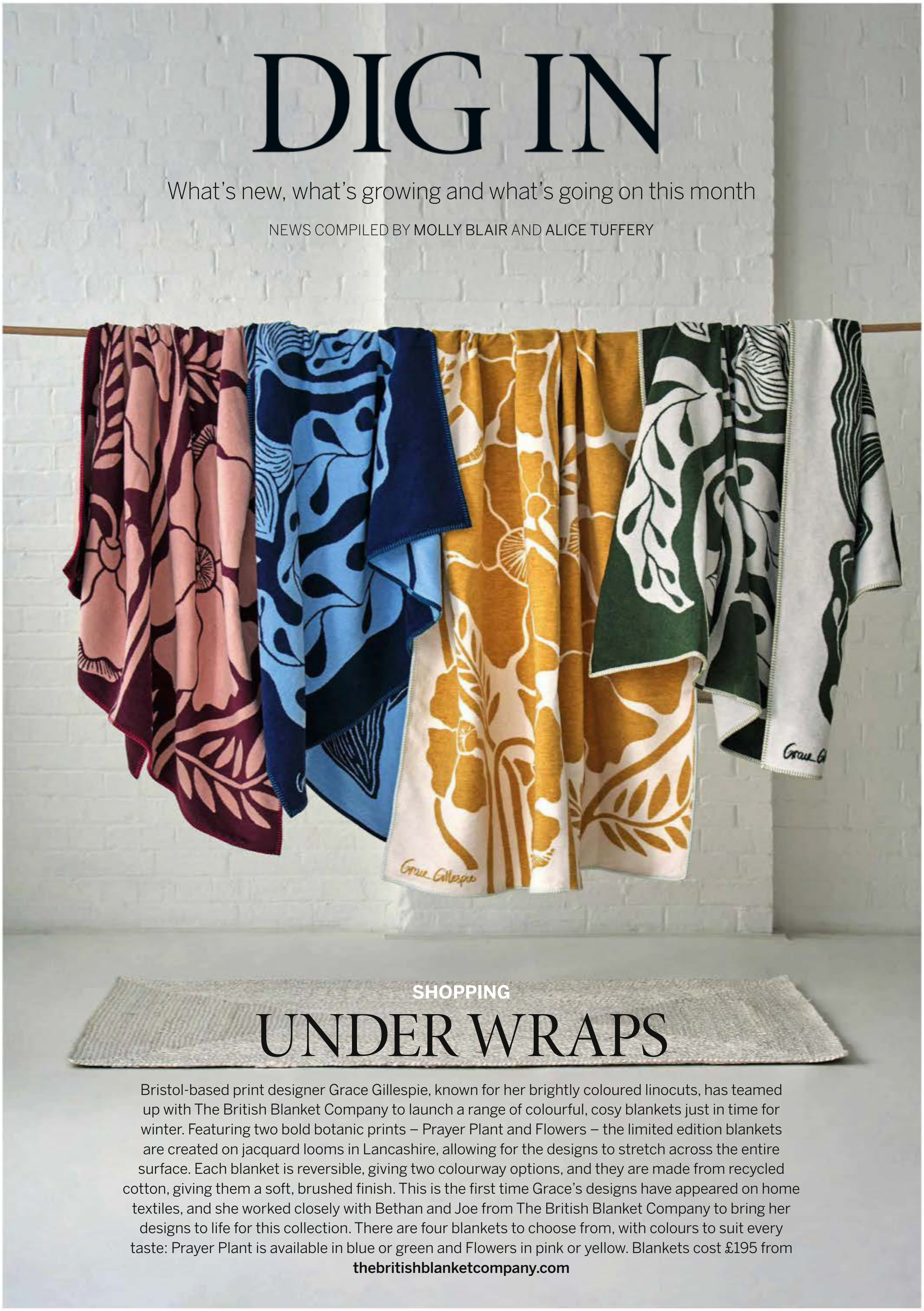
DIG IN

What's new, what's growing and what's going on this month

NEWS COMPILED BY **MOLLY BLAIR** AND **ALICE TUFFERY**



SHOPPING

UNDER WRAPS

Bristol-based print designer Grace Gillespie, known for her brightly coloured linocuts, has teamed up with The British Blanket Company to launch a range of colourful, cosy blankets just in time for winter. Featuring two bold botanic prints – Prayer Plant and Flowers – the limited edition blankets are created on jacquard looms in Lancashire, allowing for the designs to stretch across the entire surface. Each blanket is reversible, giving two colourway options, and they are made from recycled cotton, giving them a soft, brushed finish. This is the first time Grace's designs have appeared on home textiles, and she worked closely with Bethan and Joe from The British Blanket Company to bring her designs to life for this collection. There are four blankets to choose from, with colours to suit every taste: Prayer Plant is available in blue or green and Flowers in pink or yellow. Blankets cost £195 from **thebritishblanketcompany.com**

SONNY FLANAGAN PHOTOGRAPHY

JOHN CAMPBELL

WHERE HAVE ALL THE ROSES GONE?

Roses are a quintessential element of English gardens, and are loved the world over for their beautiful and often fragrant blooms. In recent years, however, some stalwart cultivars have been discontinued. Why? Breeders say it is due to concerns over their ability to perform well in the face of changing conditions.

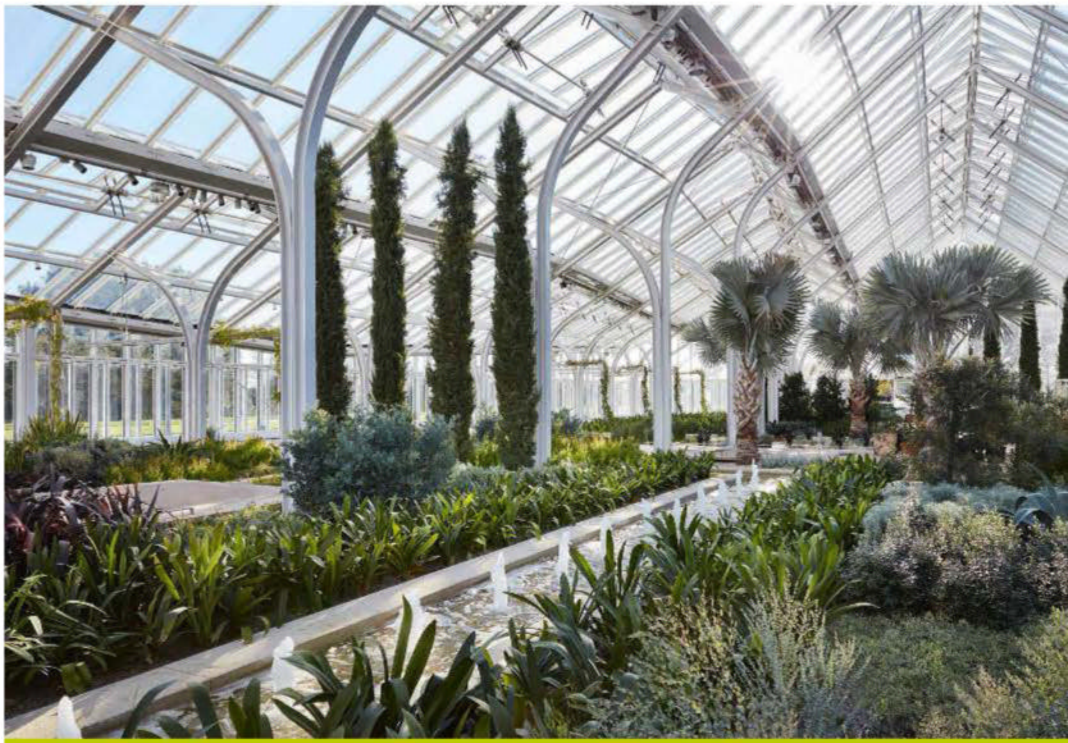
David Austin Roses, a leader in rose breeding since the 1940s, has recently retired many popular cultivars, including the much-loved *Rosa* A Shropshire Lad (='Ausled'), citing climatic changes and the evolution of plant diseases among the reasons, as well as stating that some historical varieties no longer reach its 'increasingly high standards'.

However, some avid rose lovers continue to grow and search for discontinued varieties – there is even a dedicated Facebook group called Discontinued David Austin Roses with 5,700 members.

Jenny Barnes, head gardener at Cottesbrooke Hall and an expert in rose training and sculpting, feels that these cultivars being retired creates an opportunity for gardeners to try something new. As she recently explained in her *Gardens Illustrated* online masterclass: "We tend to be led by the rose breeders. They know what they're doing; they put a lot of time, effort, money and research into coming up with these things."

In an online poll, most people told us they would miss *Rosa* Munstead Wood (='Ausbernard') the most. If one of your favourite roses is no longer available, why not give another rose a go, and maybe consider one that is more resilient to environmental factors.

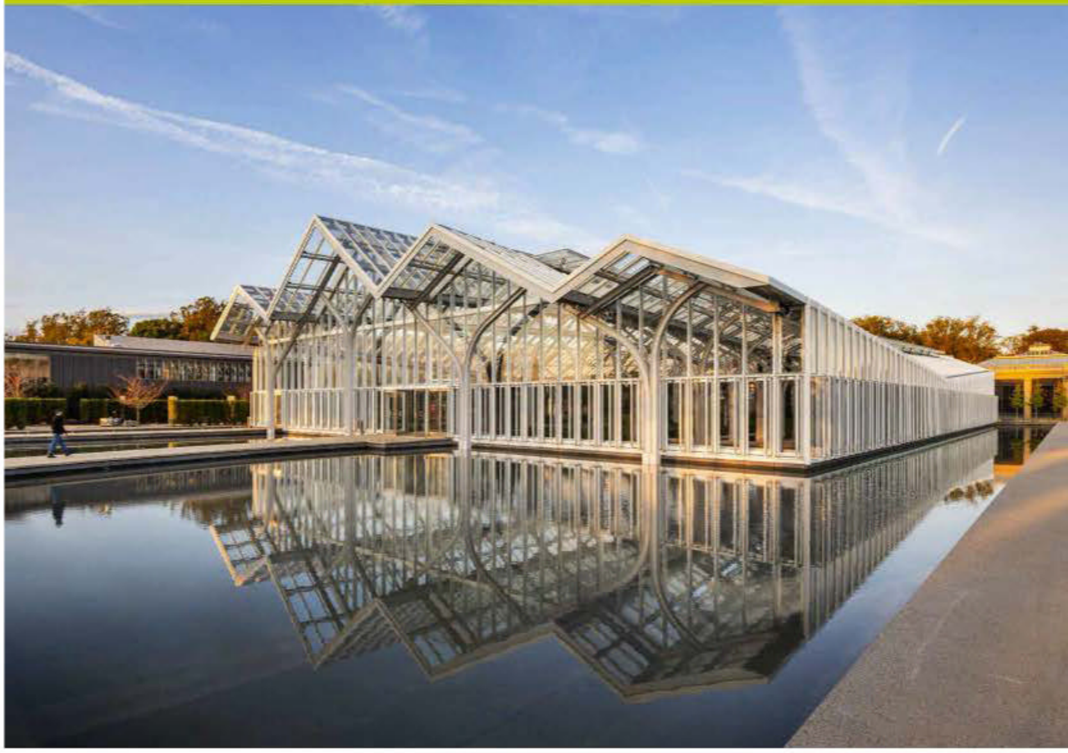
To get the expert view on retired roses, scan the QR code or visit **gardensillustrated.com/retired-roses**



DESIGN

A NEW CHAPTER

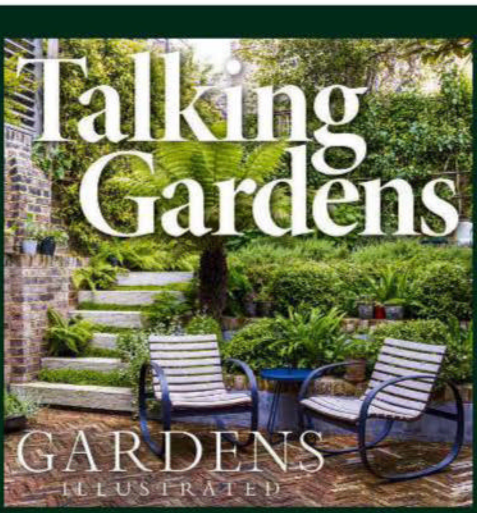
Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania has opened the final phase of its three-year renewal project Longwood Reimagined: A New Garden Experience, to the public. The largest revitalisation project in the garden's 103-year history was led by architecture practice Weiss/Manfredi, in collaboration with landscape architects Reed Hilderbrand. The project has expanded the public areas of the garden, adding new buildings and landscapes across 17 acres. The centrepiece is the huge new West Conservatory, which appears to float on water and is filled with an immersive Mediterranean garden. Another new glasshouse has been built to house the relocated Cascade Garden, originally designed in 1992 by Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx. **longwoodgardens.org**



GIFT IDEA

Sharp choice

It's become the must-have tool for gardeners everywhere and now the Japanese hori hori knife has been given a makeover by Japanese tool specialist Niwaki. Sharper and tougher than traditional alternatives, the Hori Hori Pro is forged from SK-5 carbon steel, which provides the perfect balance of strength, edge retention and toughness. Handcrafted by third-generation artisans in Japan, the Hori Hori Pro costs £39 from **niwaki.com**



DERRY MOORE

PODCAST

LISTEN OUT

Talking Gardens, the *Gardens Illustrated* podcast, is back for a fourth season with a host of fascinating new guests. Find out why Monty Don would never want hanging baskets in his garden, how Butter Wakefield cried her way through her design course and why community growing spaces are so important to John Little.

Other guests include Rosy Hardy, Charles Dowding, florist Shane Connolly and designers Jinny Blom and Ulf Nordfjell. There's also a special bonus episode with Sarah Raven and Nigel Slater, recorded live at the Garden Museum.
Follow now wherever you get your podcasts.

What to do this month

7-21 DECEMBER

Christmas at Levens Hall Take a festive stroll around the house and famous topiary garden. Saturdays and Sundays up to Christmas. From £11.50. Levens Hall, Kendal, Cumbria LA8 0PD. Tel 01539 560321, levenshall.co.uk

10 DECEMBER

Life after Leylandii Discover why not all conifers are parkland giants and how they can be a great addition to gardens of any size, in this online Garden Masterclass with Matthew Pottage. 6-7pm. £24. gardenmasterclass.org

JOANNA KOSSAK

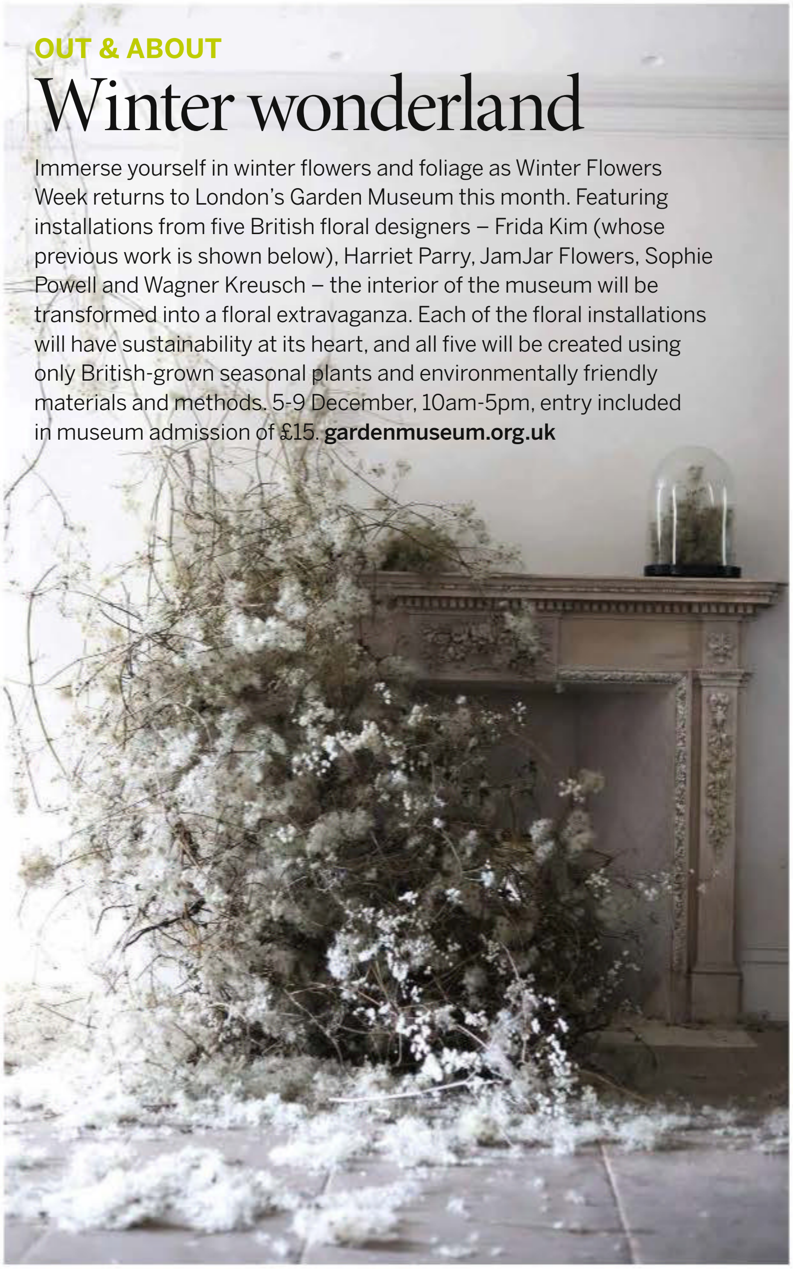
14 DECEMBER

Festive Wreath Making Learn to create a winter wreath with expert Peter Hughes. 10am-12pm or 1.30-3.30pm. £69.35. RHS Garden Bridgewater, Worsley, Salford, Greater Manchester M28 2LJ. Tel 0161 503 6100, rhs.org.uk

OUT & ABOUT

Winter wonderland

Immerse yourself in winter flowers and foliage as Winter Flowers Week returns to London's Garden Museum this month. Featuring installations from five British floral designers – Frida Kim (whose previous work is shown below), Harriet Parry, JamJar Flowers, Sophie Powell and Wagner Kreusch – the interior of the museum will be transformed into a floral extravaganza. Each of the floral installations will have sustainability at its heart, and all five will be created using only British-grown seasonal plants and environmentally friendly materials and methods. 5-9 December, 10am-5pm, entry included in museum admission of £15. **gardenmuseum.org.uk**



FOOD AND DRINK

Savour the season

If you're looking for a fresh and fruity non-alcoholic drink to help enjoy the Christmas season while keeping a clear head, the new Sparkling Clementine & Cranberry from Belvoir Farm could be the answer. Mixing real fruit and juices of clementines and cranberries, along with white grape juice and a hint of cinnamon, it is free from preservatives and artificial colours and sweeteners, and a refreshing way to enjoy the season's flavours. It's one of a range of festive drinks, including Spiced Ginger Punch and a cranberry, blackcurrant and orange Mulled Winter Cordial. Available from Sainsbury's and independent retailers, Sparkling Clementine & Cranberry costs £3.25 for a 750ml bottle.

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3 FOR THE GARDEN…

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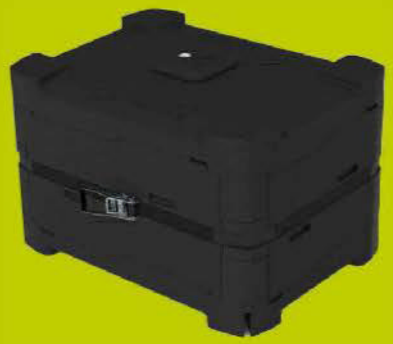

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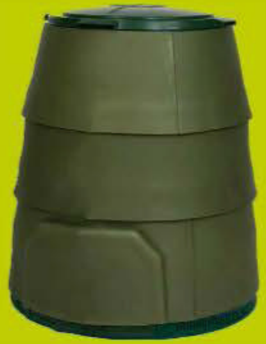
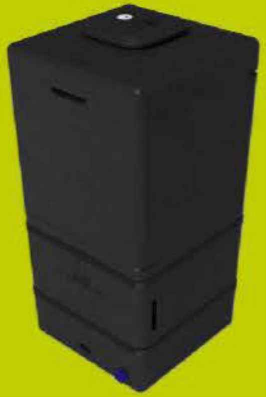
£480, Harrod Horticultural,
harrodhorticultural.com



SWEDISH DESIGN
Green Johanna (330L) and insulating jacket bundle,
£199.99, Compost Guy,
compostguy.co.uk



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The *Gardens Illustrated* podcast is back

Talking Gardens

Season 4 of our award-winning podcast is out now, with all-new guests and episodes dropping every week

DERRY MOORE

Monty Don

Gardener, broadcaster and writer

SIMON BROWN

Butter Wakefield

Award-winning garden designer

NICOLA SMITH

Charles Dowding

Market gardener and no-dig advocate

Rosy Hardy

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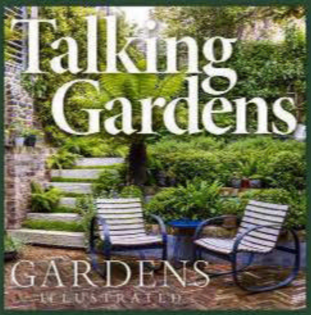


PLUS Our special Christmas bonus episode with Sarah Raven and Nigel Slater, recorded live at the Garden Museum, lands on 17 December

Search for 'Talking Gardens' on Apple Podcasts, Google, Spotify, Acast and all good podcast providers. Follow now so you never miss an episode.

TSUGA HETEROPHYLLA

A tall, evergreen conifer with a pyramidal shape, slightly drooping branches, fine-textured, dark-green needles that have two white stripes underneath, and a grapefruit scent when crushed. It has reddish-brown bark with deep, scaly ridges. Small cones with thin, flexible scales hang from the branch tips. I see this tree as a graceful northern alternative to cedars, which struggle in cool and wet climates. If you don't have space for a fully grown tree, it also makes a beautiful hedge that can even be shaped into topiary, serving as a substitute for yew. AGM*.

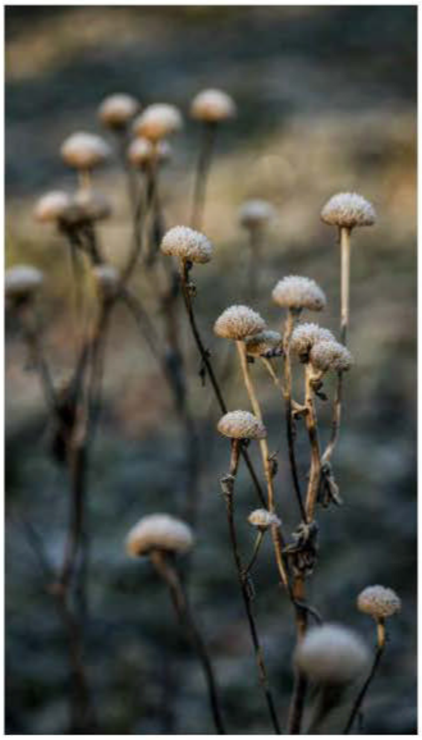
Height and spread 45m x 20m.
Origin Western North America.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, humus-rich soil; part to full shade. Intolerant of periodic droughts.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 6a-8b[†].
Season of interest Foliage: year round; cones: September – March.

Andrea Brunsendorf is head gardener at Lowther Castle & Gardens in Cumbria **lowthercastle.org**

December plants

In the last of her monthly series, Lowther Castle's head gardener **Andrea Brunsendorf** chooses ten plants that add lasting interest to see out the gardening year

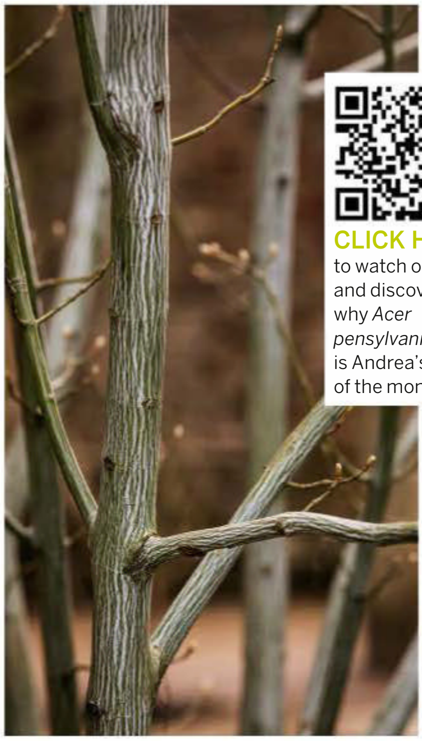
PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MAYBURY



ROSA 'GERANIUM'

Large, vigorous, vase-shaped rose with long, arching stems, fern-like dark-green foliage and unforgiving hooked thorns. It is summer-flowering and non-repeating, producing single claret-red flowers with overlapping petals and prominent yellow stamens. These turn into big elongated orange-red hips, exceptionally eye-catching in the wintery morning light. Looks best with enough space around it and only requires minimal pruning. It was raised in RHS Garden Wisley and selected in 1938. I love this beast. AGM.

Height and spread 2.5m x 1.5m.
Origin Garden (species western China).
Conditions Moist, well-drained, poor to humus-rich soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 5a-9b.
Season of interest Flowers: June – August; fruit September – December.

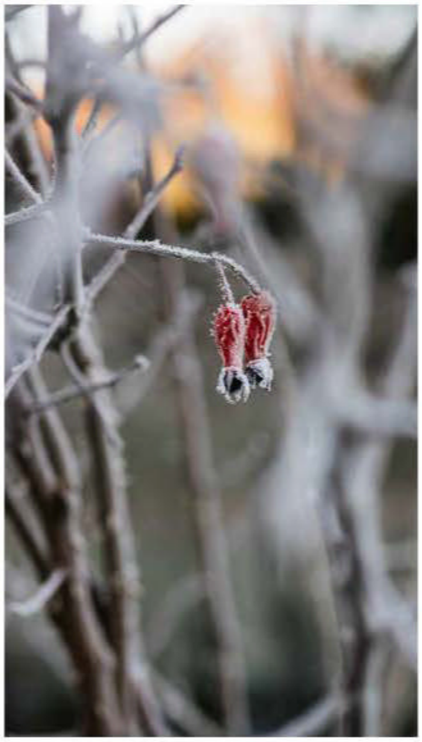


CLICK HERE to watch our video, and discover why *Acer pensylvanicum* is Andrea's plant of the month.

TELEKIA SPECIOSA

A vigorous perennial with rough heart-shaped and aromatic leaves arranged in a rosette. Stiffly branched stems are topped with shaggy, yellow, daisy-like flowers, which have numerous spidery-thin petals that elegantly catch the breeze. The nectar-rich flowers attract bees and butterflies, but birds also love to feast on the beautiful seedheads. This bold statement plant works best in natural and informal planting schemes. In Lowther's Amphitheatre, we let it freely self-seed, filling the gaps where other plants have failed in this northern climate.

Height and spread 1.5m x 1m.
Origin Central Europe to Western Asia.
Conditions Moisture-retentive to poorly drained soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 3a-7b.
Season of interest Flowers: July – September; seedheads from September.



ACER PENSYLVANICUM

My favourite small tree with beautiful snake bark, striped white to pale jade. Pinkish-tinged foliage emerges from a prominent blunt leaf bud covered with two thick scales. The bright-green leaves, which resemble a goose's foot, turn a vibrant yellow in autumn. It has conspicuous yellow-green pendulous racemes that provide food for early bees. It thrives well in our cool summers when protected from strong winds and is the main point of interest in the Ruin garden at Lowther Castle.

Height and spread 12m x 8m.
Origin Eastern North America.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, humus-rich, preferably slightly acidic soil; part shade to shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 3a-7b.
Season of interest Flowers: April – May; foliage: mid-October – November.

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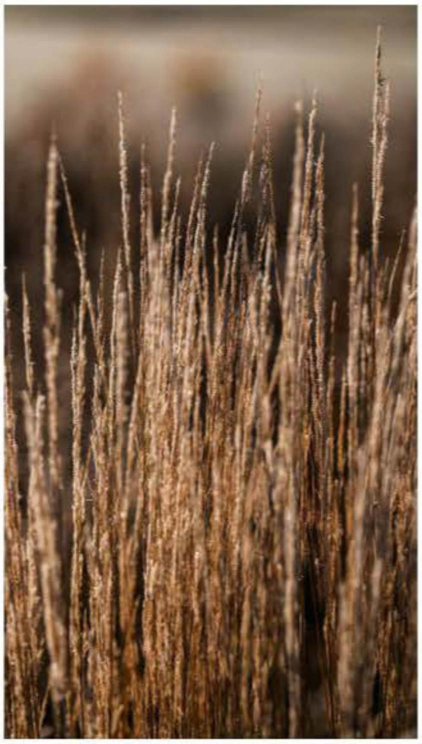
*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. 'Hardiness ratings given where available.

When young, *Fagus sylvatica*'s rich brown, sharply pointed leaf buds unfurl into broad, elliptical leaves with wavy edges and silky hairs

CALAMAGROSTIS X ACUTIFLORA 'KARL FOERSTER'

I love this beautiful perennial's year-round presence. The blooms accentuate its narrow vertical growth of mid-green foliage. It is one of the first cool-season grasses to flower with its distinct linear inflorescences, and as summer passes, these turn into narrow and upright, buff-bronze feathers that will withstand a lot of wind right into late winter. It works well planted en masse or as a repeating design element as long as it catches the breeze for that elegant movement. AGM.

Height and spread 1.5m x 70cm.
Origin Natural hybrid of *C. arundinacea* and *C. epigejos* (species Europe and Asia).
Conditions Moist, well-drained soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 5a-9b.
Season of interest Flowers: late May – August (but persist for winter interest).



FAGUS SYLVATICA

This may be too large for most residential gardens, but it is an excellent choice for attracting wildlife and providing year-round visual interest when grown as a deciduous hedge. When young, its rich brown, sharply pointed leaf buds unfurl into broad, elliptical leaves with wavy edges and silky hairs. The autumn colour is yellow to bronzy brown, and the foliage will last until spring. On unclipped trees, the bristly brown husks containing two coppery beechnuts are great for decoration. AGM.

Height and spread 30m x 20m.
Origin Europe to Caucasus.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, preferably humus-rich soil; full sun to shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 5a-7b.
Season of interest Foliage: March – May and October – February; nuts: September – December.

ROSA SPINOSISSIMA 'GRANDIFLORA'

A strong-growing shrub producing a dense thicket with its suckering habit. At Lowther, we've added it to our native hedges that naturally start walking with their suckers after a while. Its fern-like, deep-green leaflets display beautiful autumn colour. Free-flowering, with large (5-6cm), single, creamy-white blooms that crown the arching slender branches, covered with bristles and tiny thorns. I like its round, shiny, maroon-black hips in the depth of winter. Tolerates poor soil and some shade.

Height and spread 2m x 2m.
Origin Siberian Altai to Northwest China.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, humus-rich soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 5a-9b.
Season of interest Flowers: late April – July; hips: September – January.

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> Hawthorn, with its fragrant clusters of white flowers, blooms on the threshold of summer, banishing winter and welcoming the warmth

CRATAEGUS MONOGYNA

With tiny, deeply lobed leaves and spiny twigs, this native tree is a beautiful frothy sight along the wild edges of a garden. It is thought to be the only plant named after the month (May) in which it blooms. The hawthorn, with its fragrant flat-topped clusters of white flowers, blooms on the threshold of summer, banishing winter and welcoming the warmth. It is a food plant for many moth caterpillars and pollinators and provides nesting shelter. The small, deep-red berries, known as haws, are eaten by migrating birds.

Height and spread 8m x 5m.
Origin Europe, North Africa and Southwest Asia.
Conditions Moist, well-drained soil; full sun to part shade. Avoid waterlogging.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 4a-7b.
Season of interest Flowers: May – early July; fruit September – November.

DRYOPTERIS WALLICHIANA

This deciduous or semi-evergreen clump-forming fern with a vase-shaped habit is most striking, making a dramatic accent in any woodland garden setting, like our castle ruin. The unfurling fiddleheads are covered in attractive, fine, coppery-red hairs, and the sturdy, lance-shaped, dark-green fronds have brown to black midribs, creating a great contrast. The foliage can get dilapidated over winter, particularly when it's especially windy or frosty, but can be removed in early spring. Prefers cool summers. AGM.

Height and spread 1m x 1m.
Origin Southeast Asia, Central and South America.
Conditions Moist, well-drained, humus-rich soil; part to full shade.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 6a-9b.
Season of interest Foliage: year round.

TAXUS BACCATA

An evergreen native, this is the longest-lived woody shrub in northern Europe. It is a large shrub to medium-sized tree that has given rise to numerous forms. The needle-like foliage is dark green to nearly black with a yellowish or grey-green underside. Yews are dioecious with male and female plants. The latter carries arils, seeds enclosed by red berry-like flesh, which is the only non-poisonous part of the plant. It will grow in chalky to very acidic soil conditions if there is good drainage. AGM.

Height and spread 20m x 10m.
Origin Europe, Western Asia and North Africa.
Conditions Moist, well-drained soil; full sun to deep shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 6a-7b.
Season of interest Foliage year round, fruit: August – December.

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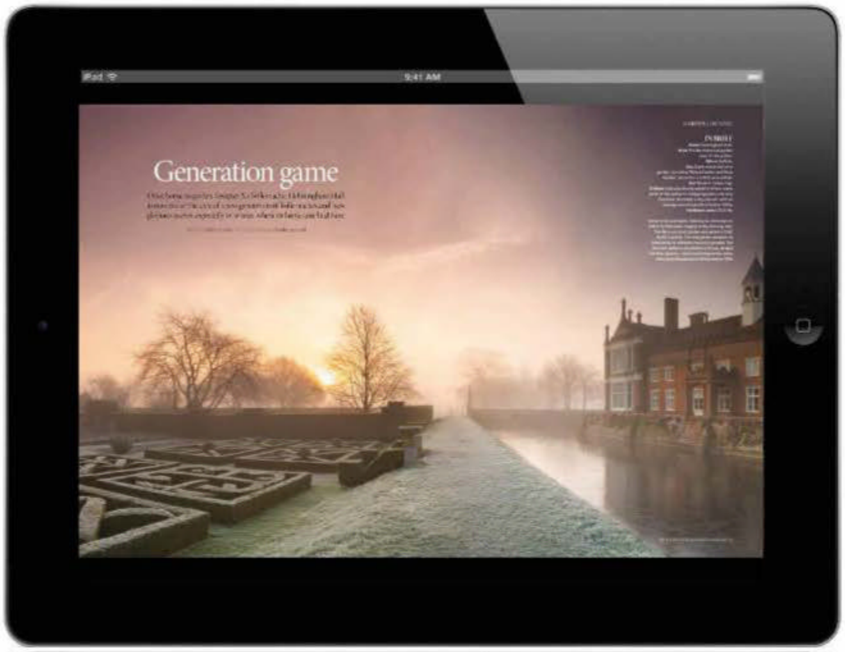
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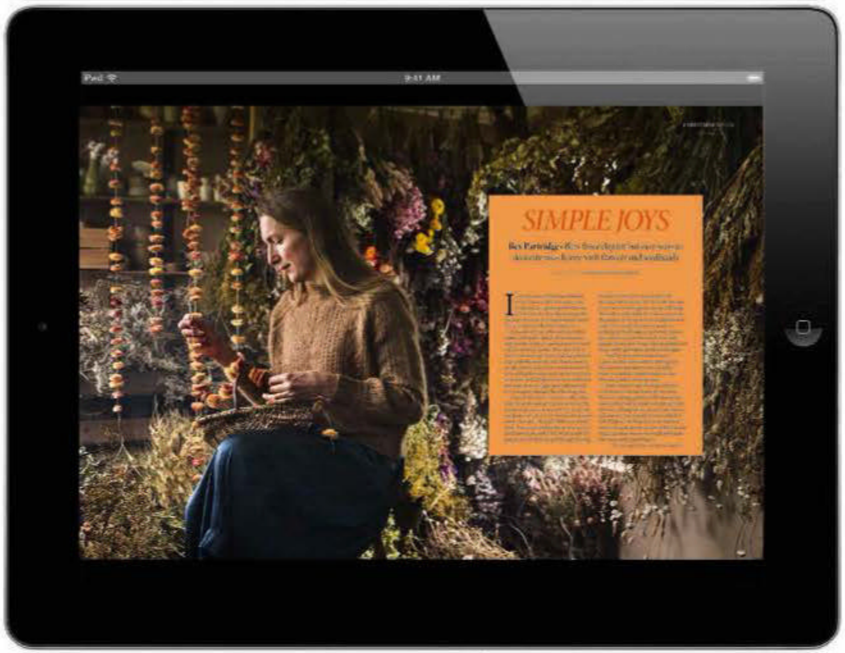
SIMPLE JOYS

Change of pace

A must-have read for passionate gardeners, *Gardens Illustrated* magazine provides a unique insight into the world's most beautiful gardens, expert advice and planting ideas.

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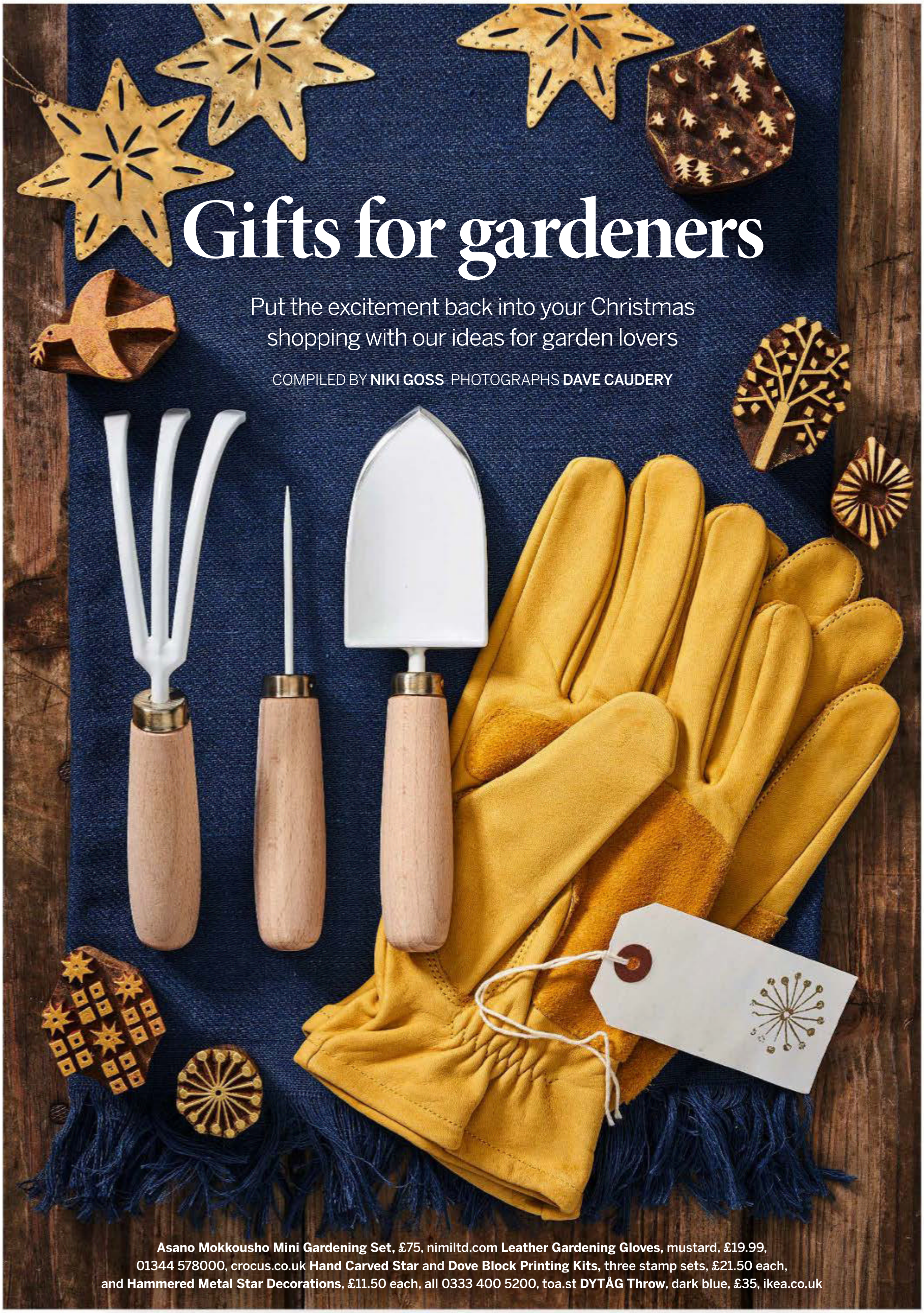

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GROWING
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Gardening Calendar
Designed by Isla Middleton
Written by Bryony Middleton

A celebration of seasonal fruit, vegetables and flowers. This calendar will guide you on a wonderful journey through the year. Beautiful hand-carved linocut prints illustrate each month along with practical growing tips to help you plan the year from seed to harvest.

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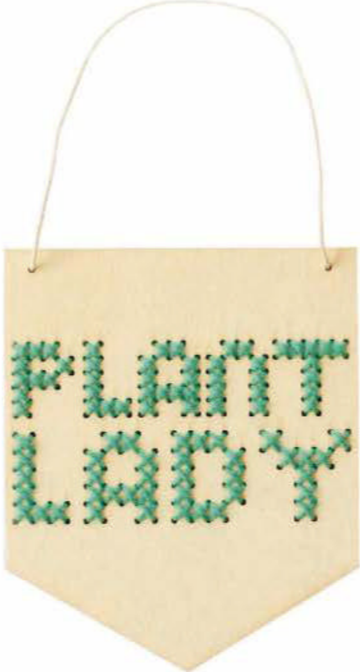

Facing page: Isla Middleton Growing Through The Seasons 2025 Gardening Calendar, £18.50, 0117 317 9640, thebristolartisan.com, snips, stylist's own. **DYTÅG Throw**, off-white, £35, ikea.co.uk **This page: Top row (left to right) Amy Krone Globe Basket,** hand-split white oak and white ash, £310, 0333 400 5200, toa.st **Nancothan Long Organic Cotton Jacket,** starling, £89.95, 01326 640075, seasaltcornwall.com **Gardeners Soap,** £7.50, 01989 561931, baileyshome.com **Middle row (left to right) Plant Lady Embroidery Board Kit,** £6.95, cottonclara.com **Fred's Armchair,** dark sage, £299, +31(0)73 747 0350, fatboy.com **Seagrass & Jute Tablemats,** naturals, set of six, £19**,** respiin.com **Bottom row (left to right) Indoor Jungle 'Window' Woven Blanket,** 75% recycled cotton, £245, arcanaliving.com **Statement Donegal Jumper,** oatmeal fleck/icelandic, 100% pure new wool, £129, 0333 400 0044, celticandco.com **Garden Glory watering can,** 8 litres, jade, £66.90, 029 2271 1801, nordicnest.com

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BEAUTY SLEEP

As his garden slumbers, **Nigel Slater** finds both joy and a sense of purpose in tidying his plot and protecting plants from inclement weather

ILLUSTRATION **PAUL WEARING** PORTRAIT **JOHN CAMPBELL**

The garden is falling asleep. Leaves sit in untidy piles ready for their transfer to string bags, where they will eventually break down into 'gardeners' gold'. Pelargoniums are shuddering at the recent cold snap, and bags of late-flowering tulip bulbs sit quietly waiting to be planted. The spindle-stemmed twigs of the wisteria are almost all down now and poised to be shredded for compost. The branches of the fig tree reach toward the sky, awaiting their fate with the tree surgeon. A few late roses droop, hanging their heads as they too are ready to sleep.

I look forward to winter in the garden, especially the seasonal tidy up, which I usually do all too late, when everything has turned to mush. Pelargoniums 'Attar of Roses' and 'Prince of Orange' will get their late autumn prune and then be brought inside for shelter. *Pelargonium* 'Lord Bute' has proved unkillable, so I might leave him to face the winter outside, close to the warm air of the Aga outlet. A risk, but it has worked before, and the stems have bulked up against the cold weather, emerging each spring as a stronger plant. The fancier, more fragile 'pellies', as I call them, are treated as annuals as I have yet to get one to overwinter even indoors.

The window boxes need something of a seasonal makeover. The *Pelargonium sidoides* will stay put, as they are less tender than one might think, or at least mine are. The *Pittosporum tobira* too, but there will be the addition of hellebores this year – a deep-red cultivar did well last Christmas, shaking off the snow, its burgundy-coloured faces smiling benignly throughout Yuletide and well into spring. Keeping thyme, lemon verbena and curry plants going through the wet, cold days of winter is almost impossible, as they hate having wet feet, but their almost-certain demise frees up a few terracotta pots.

The box of bulbs-in-bags has already come out from its summer home in the cellar. It is as if Christmas has come early, and I have already unwrapped parcels of *Muscari* 'Jenny Robinson' and *Crocus* ▷

> A few late bulbs are glaring at me accusingly. “Why aren’t we in yet?” they seem to say. My life is full of jobs done too late

▷ *olivieri* subsp. *balansae* ‘Orange Monarch’ from their crinkly wrappings. They keep in better condition in brown paper bags than anything else I’ve tried – bags large enough to let them breathe, and loosely sealed, then hidden in old wine boxes to keep them dry. A few late bulbs are glaring at me accusingly. “Why aren’t we in yet?” they seem to say. My life is full of jobs done too late.

I see nothing negative about this time of year, nothing to be sad about. I like the idea of over-wintering, a chance for a plant to sleep. There is never a frost so severe in my neck of the woods that I need to protect anything in the ground, but plants in pots are a different matter. Delicate ferns, chocolate cosmos and *Dianthus* all need a little protection. I slide them under the garden table, where they still get a little light, but are safe from the biting wind and endless rain. It seems to be wet that kills more the cold. Should there ever be a frost, I can always bring them temporarily into the dry cellar.

I learned about winter watering the hard way, losing many a plant during its dormant months. It is all too easy to overwater. Few of them need more than an occasional trickle while they sleep. That said, I’ve never had any luck with the suggestion to lift pelargoniums from their pots and wrap them in newspaper, the plants emerging in early spring as dead twigs. There is no single answer to keeping anything in fine fettle over winter. Rosemary is unshakable, as tough as old boots, but I have lost a potted lavender or two over the years.

There is a duty of care to winter gardening that appeals to me. Protecting tender growth from frost is an act of nurture and also a challenge. Keeping a plant safe from bad weather can give you a sense of purpose when there are few reasons to be outdoors.

A small task I deem essential at this time of year is to clear any deep piles of wet leaves from around the stems of shrubs. It is a messy job but necessary to ensure the plants underneath do not rot. Wet leaves are brushed from the hedges and topiary too. As the weather becomes colder, I like to turn over the stone balls that line the paths and drag pots from their terracotta feet, hunting for sleeping slugs.

You can tidy up too much. I leave stems and seedpods to wave in the winter wind. The seeds provide food for the birds. The bare, crisp stems give a certain architecture to the garden; the dried flowerheads of the hydrangeas shining gold against the dark yew hedges in the low afternoon light. Rose hips, little globes of rust and garnet red, are left in place to glow until the bushes get their new year pruning.

Until the annual rose pruning, the secateurs come out of their holster only to remove any long branches that might flap around in the wind, rocking the bushes and their roots in the process. As much as possible is left in place, to provide a winter home for insects and pollinators, but also to bring a romantic, sleeping-beauty feel to the space. I embrace the wildness of the winter garden, finding beauty in the muted colours and crisp, tangled stems.

There is much temptation to plan for next year, but I’m resisting any idea of making plans for a few weeks, until the space is as bare as possible, which will allow for clearer thinking. That doesn’t mean I won’t sit and dream – just that I refuse to commit myself to paper or go hunting for inspiration. At least, not until next month. ◻

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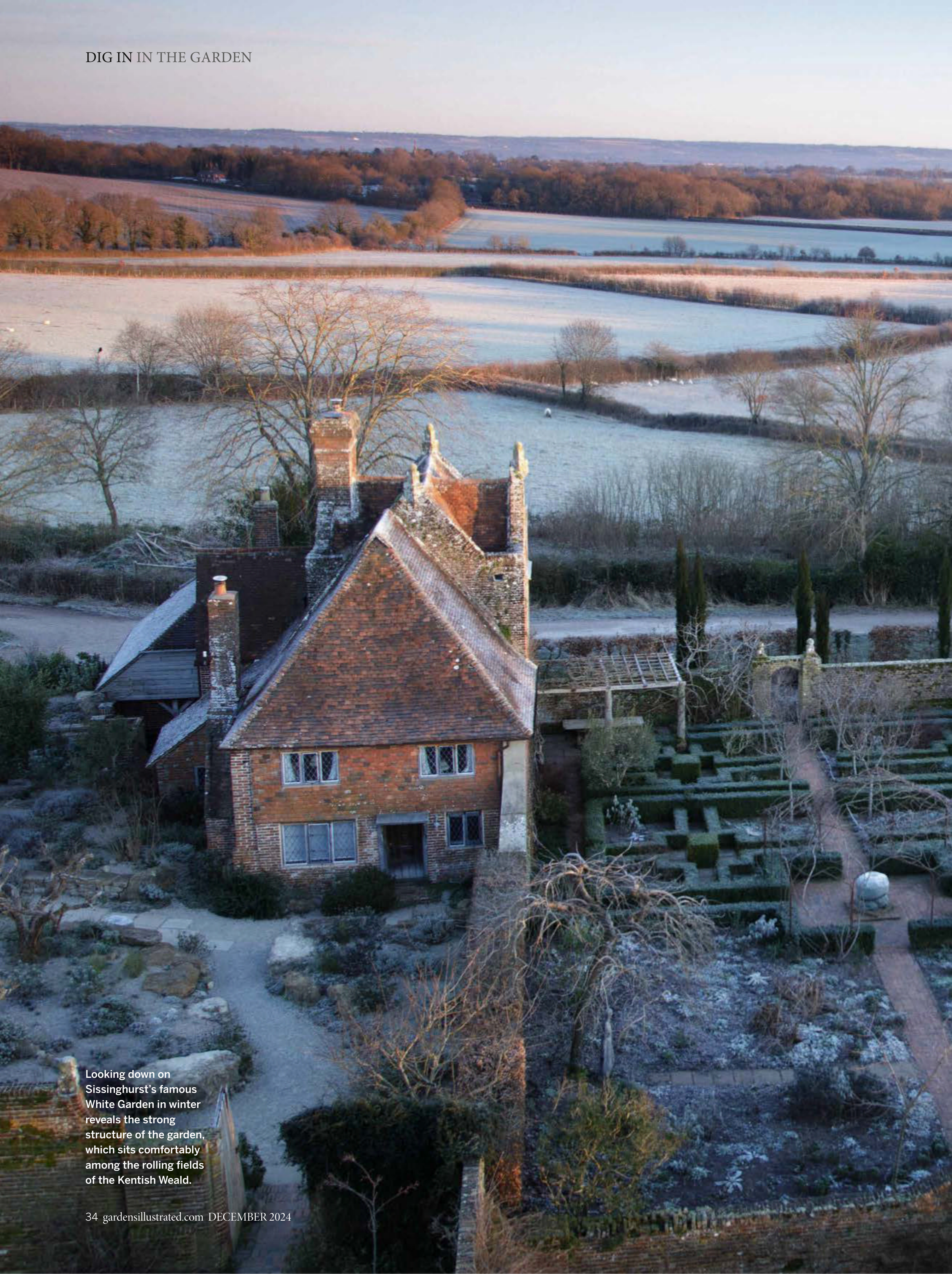


Looking down on Sissinghurst's famous White Garden in winter reveals the strong structure of the garden, which sits comfortably among the rolling fields of the Kentish Weald.

Winter at Sissinghurst

In our final visit of the working year to the gardens of Sissinghurst, head gardener **Troy Scott Smith** explains how he and his team prepare for the year ahead

PHOTOGRAPHS **JOHN CAMPBELL**

You may think winter is a time for hibernation, but far from it. Winter is a time for doing. This is the only time of the year when you have a chance of keeping pace with the garden

I like the whole process of decay that winter brings, the drawing back into the landscape, the slowing down and the time one has to reflect. You may think winter is a time for hibernation, but far from it; winter is a time for doing. This is the only time of the year when you have a chance of keeping pace with the garden, and every task done now will mean a better garden in summer. It is a season of activity, yes, but also one of deep immersion with the moment and with your surroundings. One feels a real connection with the landscape and the environment; the sounds, smells and light all have a distinctive winter flavour.

Winter at Sissinghurst is all about rose pruning. We start in early November with the climbers and ramblers (although this is becoming more difficult with the roses hanging on to their foliage for longer with the milder autumn weather). Next, we move on to Vita Sackville-West's collection of more than 300 'old' shrub roses.

The current method of pruning and training roses was introduced by Jack Vass, who was head gardener at Sissinghurst from 1939 to 1957. The technique involves pulling the long supple wands of growth down in an arc and anchoring into position. This bending of shoots near to horizontal prevents sap rising to the top of each stem, instead it encourages flowers to break from every bud along the entire length of the bent stem.

A rose that needs very little pruning is the Burnet rose (*Rosa spinosissima*) and in recent years I have become excited at the potential of this little Scots rose. Vita once wrote of them: 'The myriads of small flowers look as though swarms of butterflies had settled on the ferny foliage'. For me it is their resilience to our drier summers, their happy disposition, their attractive and healthy foliage, their early flowering and their good-looking hips that make them a group of roses worthy of consideration.

Elsewhere, we selectively cut and clear herbaceous perennials, only leaving those that either provide habitat for overwintering insects, such as the hollow stems of *Cirsium*, or those that offer good winter structure, such as fennel. Emerging from the parchment colours of these skeletal perennials are dabs of colour from the early flowering, but often overlooked, wood anemone, *A. nemorosa*. In our old nut coppice we have it growing alongside a beautiful pale-yellow form called *A.* x *lipsiensis*, where it acts as a duvet upon which other small flowering bulbs rest. ◻

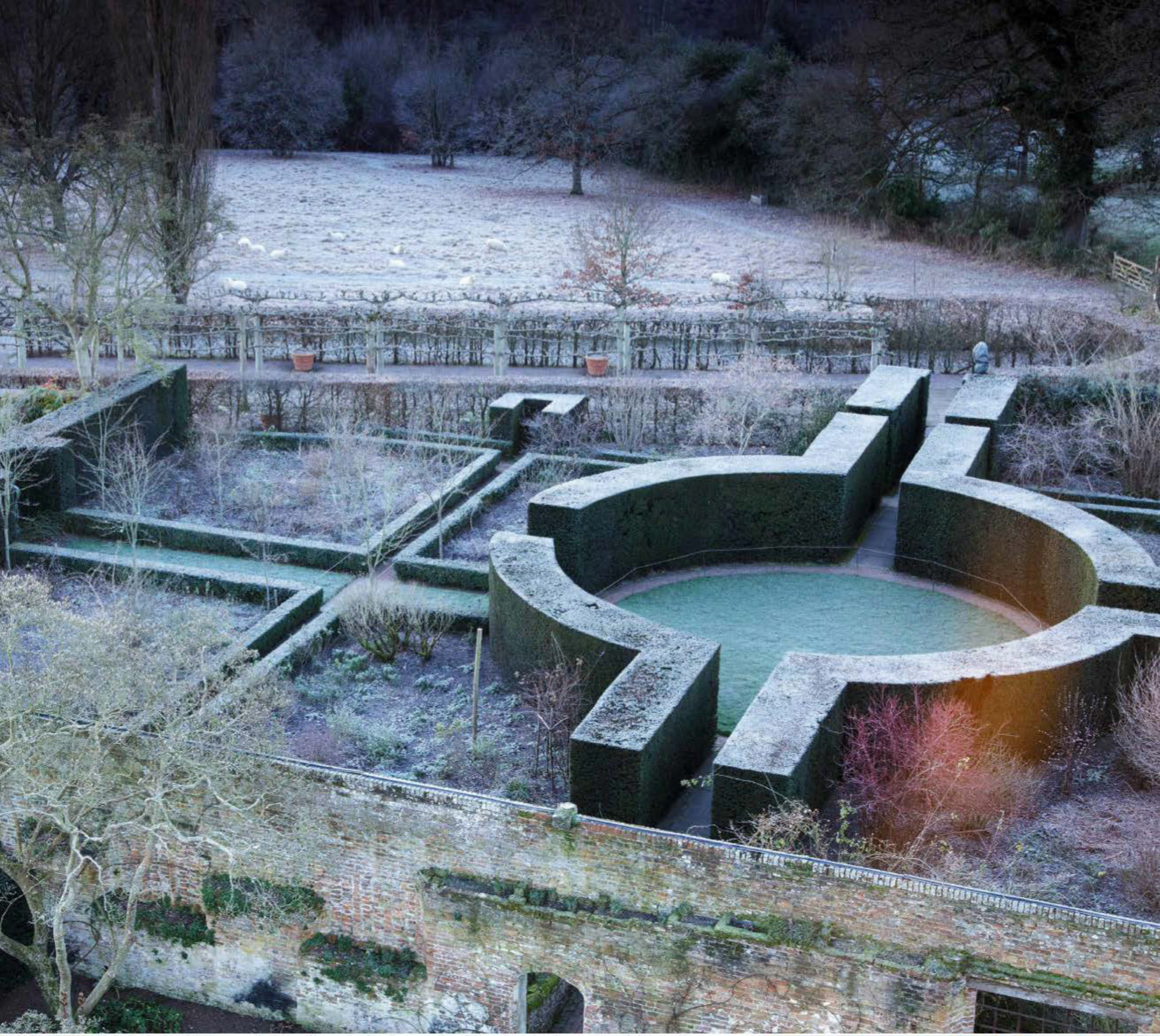
Turn the page to see more of Troy's winter tasks ▷

Main image
Winter lays bare the sharp lines of the curved yew hedge, known as the Rondel, which Harold Nicolson designed for the area that became the Rose Garden. The geometry of Harold's design at Sissinghurst is in stark contrast to the wooliness of the farmland that sweeps up to the garden.

Bottom row from left
At Sissinghurst fallen fruit is left to lie where it drops, providing the many birds, hedgehogs and mice that share these gardens with food to feast on through the long winter months. By the spring, not a single fruit remains.

In the Rose Garden, wall-trained figs, including *Ficus carica* 'Brown Turkey' and *F. carica* 'White Marseilles', are grown for foliage effect rather than fruit. They are pruned and new shoots tied in in late March.

The long filigree shoots of *Rosa* 'Mulliganii', a rarely grown rambler from Yunnan introduced by George Forrest, thread and twine themselves through the delicate metal framework of the arbour in the White Garden.



WINTER TASKS AT SISSINGHURST

Planting bulbs

We aim to get all our spring-flowering bulbs planted by Christmas. Sooner would be better, but our schedule rarely allows this. In the beds and borders we plant bulbs that we expect to be long-lived, this year adding *Narcissus* 'Snipe', a cyclamineus type raised in Wales in the 1940s. In the raised stone troughs we take the opportunity to experiment with new bulbs. This year we are planting *Fritillaria pontica* and *Cyclamen coum*, their new growth protected from birds and mice with a 'cage' of fern fronds and *Cornus* twigs.

Marking plants

Before the first frosts of the winter and the cutting down of herbaceous material we place bamboo sticks horizontally, pinned in place with bent wire, and short sticks pushed into the ground, with different-coloured tape on top. Although we usually try to hide the 'mechanics' of a garden, this visual reference is invaluable when the plants have retreated underground and you need to know where the crowns of plants are for lifting and dividing and the extent of their maximum spread.

Taking cuttings

Winter is the ideal time to take hardwood cuttings of many shrubs, including lilacs. Although slower to produce independent plants, this method of propagation is straightforward and usually successful. Cut 30cm long stems approximately pencil thickness, with a flat cut at the base and a sloping cut at the top. Push these two thirds of their length into the soil in nursery rows or into a pot and simply wait, for about 18 months, by when they should have rooted and be ready for moving and replanting into their flowering position.

Coppicing hazel

Each year in winter we selectively cut a few of the hazel stems in the Nuttery to the ground to maintain the balance of new and old stems. The Nuttery or nut platt is made up of Kentish cobnuts, a variety of hazel thought to be planted at the turn of the 19th century. Harold records in his diary the moment he and Vita decided to buy Sissinghurst: 'We suddenly came upon a nut walk, and that settles it.' Traditionally coppiced and used for timber, as well as nut production, Vita and Harold instead underplanted the nut grove with a carpet of polyanthus. Today, the polyanthus have gone and in their place a palette of woodland plants seductively colonises the pools of dappled half-light.

Bareroot planting

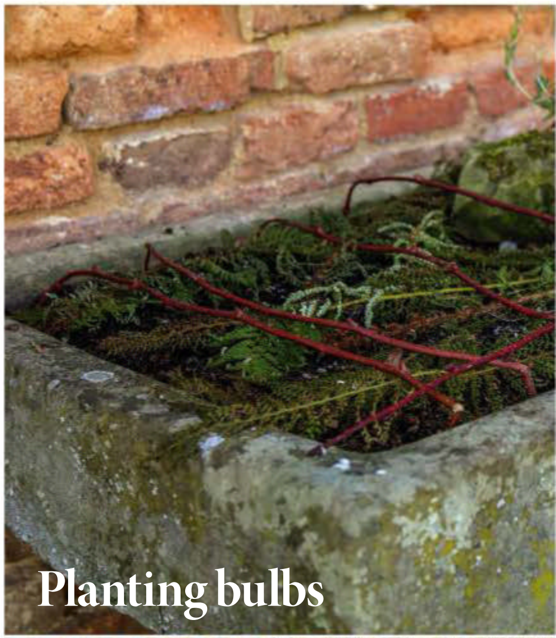
Winter is the time for bareroot planting. By this we mean plants, such as roses, hedging, trees and shrubs that have been grown in the field and lifted once they've become dormant, around early November. So long as the ground is not waterlogged or frozen, these bareroot plants can be planted between November and February without any check to their growth.

Pruning roses

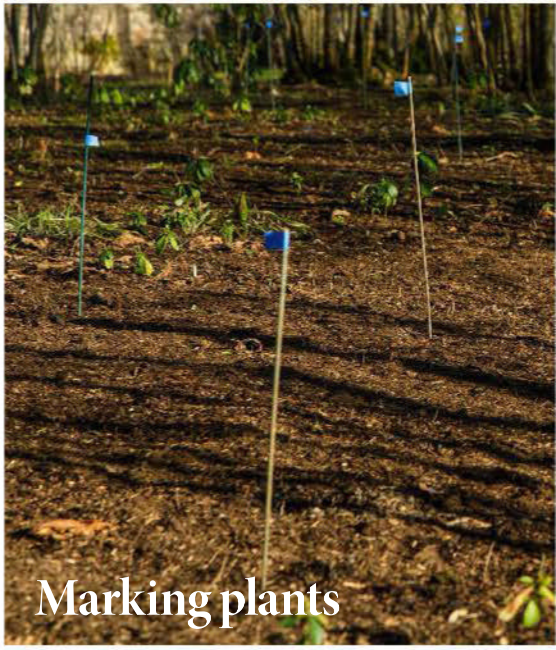
We grow many 'old roses' at Sissinghurst ('old' meaning those bred before 1867 when the first hybrid tea rose, *Rosa* 'La France', was introduced). Vita loved the romance of these old roses and planted them freely at Sissinghurst, with many of these original plantings still thriving today. To ensure their good health we winter prune and spring feed. Pruning starts in November (weather dependent), usually with the climbers and ramblers, and continues into December and January with our collection of shrub roses. We remove old wood to encourage new, prune back flowered stems and tie down the new long shoots.

WATCH OUR HOW-TO VIDEO

To see how Troy prunes roses, and get more tips, scan the QR code with your phone camera or head to **gardensillustrated.com/prune-roses**



Pruning roses



USEFUL INFORMATION
Address Sissinghurst Castle, Biddenden Road, nr Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2AB.
Tel 01580 710700. **Web** nationaltrust.org.uk/sissinghurst
Open Gardens open daily 11am-5.30pm. Admission £17.
Follow Troy on Instagram @troyscottsmith1

Turn the page to see more of Sissinghurst in winter ▷

Each year in winter we selectively cut a few of the hazel stems in the Nuttery to the floor to maintain the balance of new and old stems

Coppicing hazel

What sets Sissinghurst apart is how it emerges from the very soil it is hefted to. It is a garden inextricably linked to the buildings it surrounds and, in turn, the farmland that sweeps up to its walls.

> One feels a real connection with the landscape and the environment, the sounds, smells and light all have a distinctive winter flavour

The wider estate

Vita Sackville-West had a very real and immediate relationship with the land. She loved the idea of the timelessness of the Weald, of the old buildings and garden growing out of the land where they sat, and the materials from which they were fashioned being of the land. Vita shared this vision of Sissinghurst with her husband Harold Nicolson and together they reinvested life in the ruin with both flowers and farm. We benefit from the moves that Vita and Harold made, and from the legacy they left behind; a more reflective, romantic, slower, deeper place than might have been. Today the garden sits within 470 acres of mixed Wealden landscape, including on its southern flank, 200 acres of woodland, with permanent pasture and arable to the north and east. Here and there fingers of Orchard reach to meet the garden and everywhere there is a sense of harmony and balance, of health and of nature thriving. In recent years we have reintroduced the old farm pond that once stood at the garden entrance, reconnected the garden with the estate by allowing a stronger visual and physical dialogue between them and we have allowed native wildings to gently colonise and share our beds of exotics.

GARDEN
MASTERCLASS

Curated by garden designer Annie Guilfoyle and horticulturalist Noel Kingsbury

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EMILY ADCOCK

Having completed work on the Oudolf Landscape at RHS Garden Wisley, horticulturist Emily is now working on a Piet Oudolf design for a private estate in Berkshire

PORTRAIT ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Earliest gardening memory Begging my mother to get us an allotment when I was seven. I remember the criticism we received for keeping the tall ash tree that grew in the middle of our new plot. I hope opinions have changed 20 years on.

First plant love Roses. I remember my mum taking my brother and me to this old walled tennis court on an abandoned estate to play tennis as children. Surrounding the court were roses, and despite not having been pruned for many years, they flowered prolifically. I would collect as many petals as I could to take home and dry into confetti.

Who has inspired your career Wisley's horticulturist Jack Aldridge. I was lucky enough to be on the same team as Jack when I first started at RHS Garden Wisley. His passion for plants is the most infectious thing.

Who are your horticultural heroes? Piet Oudolf and Tom Stuart-Smith. They are my inspiration for really getting to know your plants before designing gardens with them, which is something I feel really passionate about.

Favourite garden Tom Stuart-Smith's garden at The Barn. Perennials are incredible for the way they can provide almost instant impact, but the beauty of a garden that develops over years with the maturity of trees and slow-growing yew hedging cannot be overlooked.

Favourite planting style Naturalistic planting with plant favourites repeated organically through a border. I like it when plants and ornamental grasses are selected for a long season of interest, so keeping your beds standing through winter is an easy option, aesthetically as well as for wildlife.

Favourite 'weed' The common daisy (*Bellis perennis*). When I was a child we planted these in our lawn because they looked so beautiful in full bloom.

Biggest challenge facing gardeners today A lot of people see horticulturists as garden labourers and, of course, some of the work is laborious, but I want to shift people's thinking, to appreciate horticulturists as artists of the natural world.

One thing gardeners can do to be more sustainable Plan the planting in your garden. Positioning plants badly goes hand in hand with buying something you instantly like from the garden centre, and then squeezing it in wherever there is space. Planning ahead and putting thought into your plant purchases goes a long way to improving both the aesthetics and sustainability of your garden.

What principles have guided your attitude? In your own garden, your most important clients are the wildlife that visit. If there is a tree or shrub they are particularly fond of, for goodness sake, do not remove it.

What do you see as the future of horticulture? Wildlife gardening or gardening for biodiversity shouldn't be seen as a style of gardening, but as an approach all gardeners take.

Instagram @hortdamn

People see horticulturists as garden labourers, but I want to shift people's thinking, to appreciate them as artists of the natural world

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO RHS GARDEN WISLEY IN SURREY, WHERE THIS PORTRAIT WAS TAKEN

SIMPLE JOYS

Bex Partridge offers three elegant but easy ways to decorate your home with flowers and seedheads

PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY

It has become a Christmas tradition in my house to fill every space with seedheads and glowing dried flowers. It's the one time I'm allowed to go all out when it comes to bringing nature inside, and so I make the absolute most of it.

Dried flowers can offer such incredible beauty during the darker winter months, and provide a hint of sparkle and joy in dark corners and cosy nooks. They also offer a way to decorate our homes that has minimal impact on the environment. These projects are all natural, aside from a small amount of wire and golden twine, and can be saved year after year; packed safely away in a cardboard box away from sunlight, heat and moisture, to be brought out again the following year.

I have a few firm plant favourites that I like to work with at Christmas time. My absolute favourite is honesty for its silvery seedpods, which are revealed as the papery outer cases are stripped off the front and back. The act of peeling honesty is such a meditative task, and I will often enlist the help of my children to get through the big bundles I have harvested and dried throughout summer. We sit by the fire and work our way through the stems, collecting the seeds as they fall to be scattered around the garden, to bring us more seedheads next year. The reveal of the silvery inside is nothing short of magical, and when used in decorations such as the wreath and table display shown here, bring natural sparkle and shine, softly glowing in gentle candle light.

Another favourite is strawflowers. I grow endless stems of these throughout the summer and adore their colourful tones; a beautiful counterbalance to the ethereal qualities of the honesty.

Quite often as I am working with the strawflowers I knock heads off here and there, so making garlands with them is the most perfect way to create a simple yet truly effective offering for my home. I use these to decorate my tree instead of tinsel (which is full of plastic), to hang above my fireplace and to string from the corners of the room in much the same way as we would previously have done with paper chains.

Turn the page for Bex's Christmas makes ▷

A TABLE FULL OF STARS

Setting the table is my favourite task at Christmas – I put as much effort into creating this as I do cooking the main meal. I love a bit of sparkle more than heavy greenery, and the brass leaves in the overhanging display add that hint of magic to the scene. An overhead display ensures there is lots of room on the table for the food and gifts. Fluffy seedheads fill the table alongside candles that set off all the botanicals. In this display, I have used my own 'frog' pins made from pottery, but you could use Kenzan frog pins or even small glass vessels instead.

You will need

- A metal ring in a diameter of your choice and to fit your table (the one shown here is 40cm)
- Twisted hazel (*Corylus avellana*) branches or any gnarly branch
- Thin gauge wire
- Peeled honesty (*Lunaria annua*)
- String to hang the metal ring
- A hook or command hook from which to hang the table centre
- Ethereal seedheads. I've used *Clematis* 'Bill MacKenzie', but any clematis will work. Bunny's tail (*Lagurus ovatus*), pennycress (*Thlaspi arvense*) or nipplewort (*Lapsana communis*) would all do just as well.
- Brass leaves (these are from ALBA Jewellery)

How to make

1. To begin, use the wire to carefully attach your branches to the circular metal wreath base. I cut lengths of the wire and attach the branches intermittently along the wreath base, ensuring that they are very securely in place.
2. Once the branches are in place, take small stems of honesty (breaking the larger branches down into smaller segments) and attach these small stems to the outer ends of the hazel branches, using more of the thin gauge wire. You will find natural spaces to add these honesty stems too, mimicking the way a plant would grow and flower in nature.
3. This is visually all about the negative space. We don't want to overload the branches with honesty; just the odd stem here or there to provide sparkle and interest all over.
4. Once the honesty is all in place, hang the structure from a hook that sits centrally over the table. The brass leaves can now be hung in position using the thin wire that accompanies them. Loop them over the stems of the twisted hazel at various positions through and around the circular structure.
5. Now to lay the table. I have focused very much on neutrals here, using soft linens and handmade pottery. In among the place settings and glasses, I have dotted beeswax candles and flower frogs filled with seedheads gathered from the garden over the summer.

HONESTY WREATH

Sometimes simplicity is best, and with this wreath I've focused on one ingredient: honesty. It's easy to make and can be hung on a sheltered front door or kept in the house. It's best to cut honesty for drying in late summer rather than waiting for nature to strip the seedpods bare. This ensures stronger stems and silver centres, which will give the wreath longevity, and also makes it easier to store the pods until you are ready to use them.

You will need

- A woven wreath base (I have used a 20cm wreath base here; the final piece will be roughly twice the size of your base)
- Stems of honesty
- A length of ribbon or twine to hang from
- Snips to work with

How to make

1. Strip your honesty stems completely of any leaves and cut with snips into smaller lengths of stems. Approximately 20-30cm should be good.
2. Peel all the honesty seedpods to reveal their silvery inner shell. Starting at the top of the wreath, carefully insert each stem into the weave of the wreath base. If you push very gently, you will begin to feel when the stem has become secure in its position. Give it a wiggle if unsure, and if it feels secure then it is safely in place.
3. Work your way around the wreath, carefully inserting stems, ensuring that you cover the top, the inside section of the wreath and the outer edge.
4. At various points when building your wreath, hold it up against a solid wall to see how it looks set against a background. You don't want to overload the wreath with honesty stems; rather allow each stem to have its space to breathe.
5. Once the wreath is full of honesty, loop a length of velvet ribbon or twine around the back and hang in position.

STRAWFLOWER GARLANDS

These garlands can be made with strawflowers or other simple dried blooms. Ideally, for the best effect, you want to use flowers that have a circular shape and hold their colour well. I've used a gold-threaded twine to string mine together, but any length of ribbon, twine or cotton will do. Just ensure that it is strong enough to hold the weight of the flowers. It is not necessary to knot between each flowerhead, as the thread should hold them in position – it's why using a thicker twine or thread works better for this make.

You will need

- Dried heads of strawflowers (*Xerochrysum bracteatum*). Widely available online if you haven't grown your own
- A thick darning needle
- Snips
- Twine (I have used a gold-threaded twine here, which is available from most online haberdasheries)

How to make

1. Cut a length of twine approximately 2.5m long – this will allow for the garland to finish up at 2m long, which I find is an optimal length to work with without everything getting in a tangle.
2. Tie a loop at one end (this will be used to hang the garland from when its finished).
3. Thread your needle onto the opposite end, pulling a small amount of length through the needle.
4. Working with the flowers all facing in one direction, pierce the needle through the front of the flowerhead carefully, pushing through until it comes out the other side. Do take care with the needle, use a thimble if it helps, as the flowerheads can be very tricky to push through and you may need protection from the needle shooting out the other side.
5. Once the needle is through, carefully pull the flowerhead all the way down to the bottom of the length of twine so it sits just above the loop you have made.
6. Keep threading the flowerheads on, spacing them out as you prefer (I normally allow an inch or two between each one) until you have reached close to the end of the twine.
7. If you want to hang your garland in swags like a paper chain, leave enough room on the end of the twine to create another loop, and your garland is ready to hang.

USEFUL INFORMATION
Find out more about Bex Partridge's work at **botanicaltales.com**

SCAN HERE
Watch our video to see how Bex creates these strawflower garlands, or go to **gardensillustrated.com/natural-christmas**

Generation game

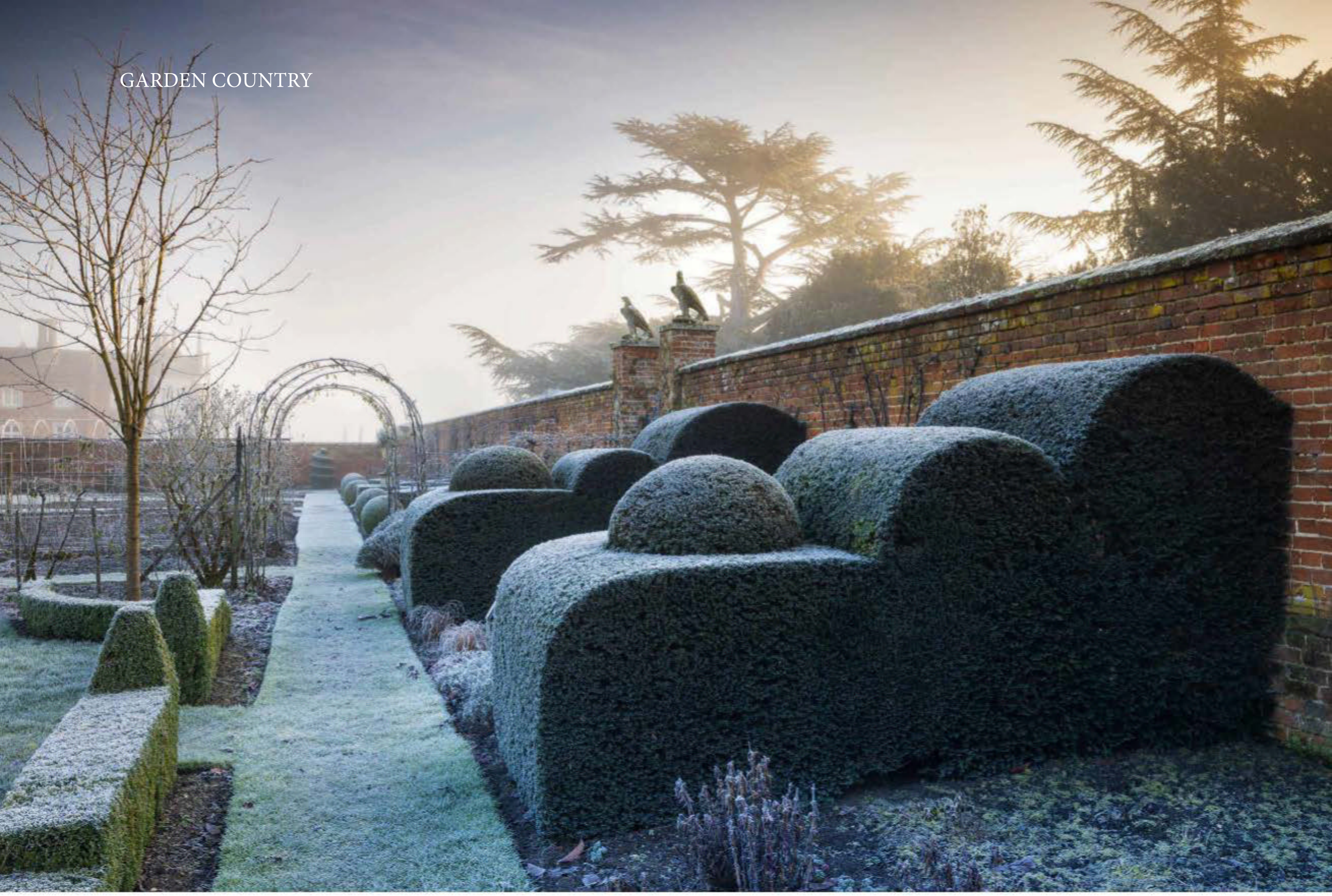
Once home to garden designer Xa Tollemache, Helmingham Hall is now under the care of a new generation of Tollemaches and is as glorious as ever, especially in winter when its bones are laid bare

WORDS **CHRIS YOUNG** PHOTOGRAPHS **RICHARD BLOOM**

IN BRIEF

Name Helmingham Hall.
What Private historical garden open to the public.
Where Suffolk.
Size Eight-and-a-half acre garden, including Walled Garden and Rose Garden, set within a 5,500-acre estate.
Soil Alkaline, heavy clay.
Climate Cold and strong easterly winds; many parts of the walled or hedged gardens are very sheltered. Normally a dry climate, with an average annual rainfall of below 700m.
Hardiness zone USDA 8b.

Home to Ed and Sophie Tollemache, Helmingham Hall in Suffolk looks magical in the morning mist. The Herb and Knot Garden was added in 1982 by Ed's parents, Tim and garden designer Xa Tollemache, to reference historical gardens. The two knot patterns are planted with box, divided into four squares – some containing herbs, some with plants introduced to Britain before 1750.



There's no doubt that taking over the responsibility for an established garden is a daunting task, but it's especially so if you have 500 years of familial predecessors looking down on you. Add to this the fact that your mother-in-law is the well-respected garden designer Xa Tollemache – who has made this one of the most interesting gardens in England – and you'd forgive Sophie Tollemache if she felt somewhat overwhelmed. "But there's been such a gentle transition from Xa and my father-in-law Tim to me and my husband Ed, that I'm just really excited about the future of this place," she says.

For Ed and Sophie are the current incumbents (20th generation) of Helmingham Hall in Suffolk. They left London in 2017 and moved to the family home, where they now bring up their three children. It is iconic, unique and totally captivating – a house surrounded by a 20m-wide moat, it oozes history and beauty. "Ed's parents moved here in 1975," says Sophie, "and established Helmingham as a thriving garden and events venue, as well as the wider estate business. It was Xa who learned her garden design craft here and used the gardens as her classroom."

And what a classroom to learn in: a moated (yes, moated) one-acre walled garden to the west that grows fruit, vegetables and flowers; wildflower meadows; deer park; trees and woods; and to the east, added in 1982, the Herb and Knot Garden, with the Rose Garden. "Xa, along with former head gardener Roy Balaam, did so much in their time here," says Sophie. "Now I'm responsible for the gardens, I want to look at the impact our increasingly variable climate is having on Helmingham, so we need to take a modern, sustainable approach to the beautiful gardens that Xa created." The current head gardener, Brendan Arundel, was appointed in 2021 and receives much praise from Sophie. Responsible for three full-time and one part-time gardeners, and several volunteers, Brendan is the hands-on force driving the daily working of the garden.

Yet what underpins all eight-and-a-half acres of domestic garden are great 'bones' – structure, proportion and scale, all of which are accentuated at this time of year. Years of owning the same bit of land, years of gardening, and years of tweaking, mean that the overall layout is superb. Yew hedging (organic shapes and straight lines), trees (recently planted and historic), water, walls, sculpture and hard landscaping ensure that while there may be fewer flowers in winter, beautiful structures and the patina of age are as enjoyable.

"There's a very different character in winter," says Sophie. "It's completely exquisite when ▷

Above A pair of tightly clipped bookend yews create a perfect winter outline in the Walled Garden. Expertly topiarised by one of the gardeners, Chris Reeve, these add structure throughout winter.

Right above Early morning mist atmospherically rises from one of Helmingham's two moats. This one also has drawbridges, both of which are raised every night, as they have been for hundreds of years.

Right below Created in 1978, the Parterre features low planting of box hedging infilled with *Santolina chamaecyparissus*. In summer the round bed surrounding one of two large stone urns is planted with wallflowers and white cosmos.

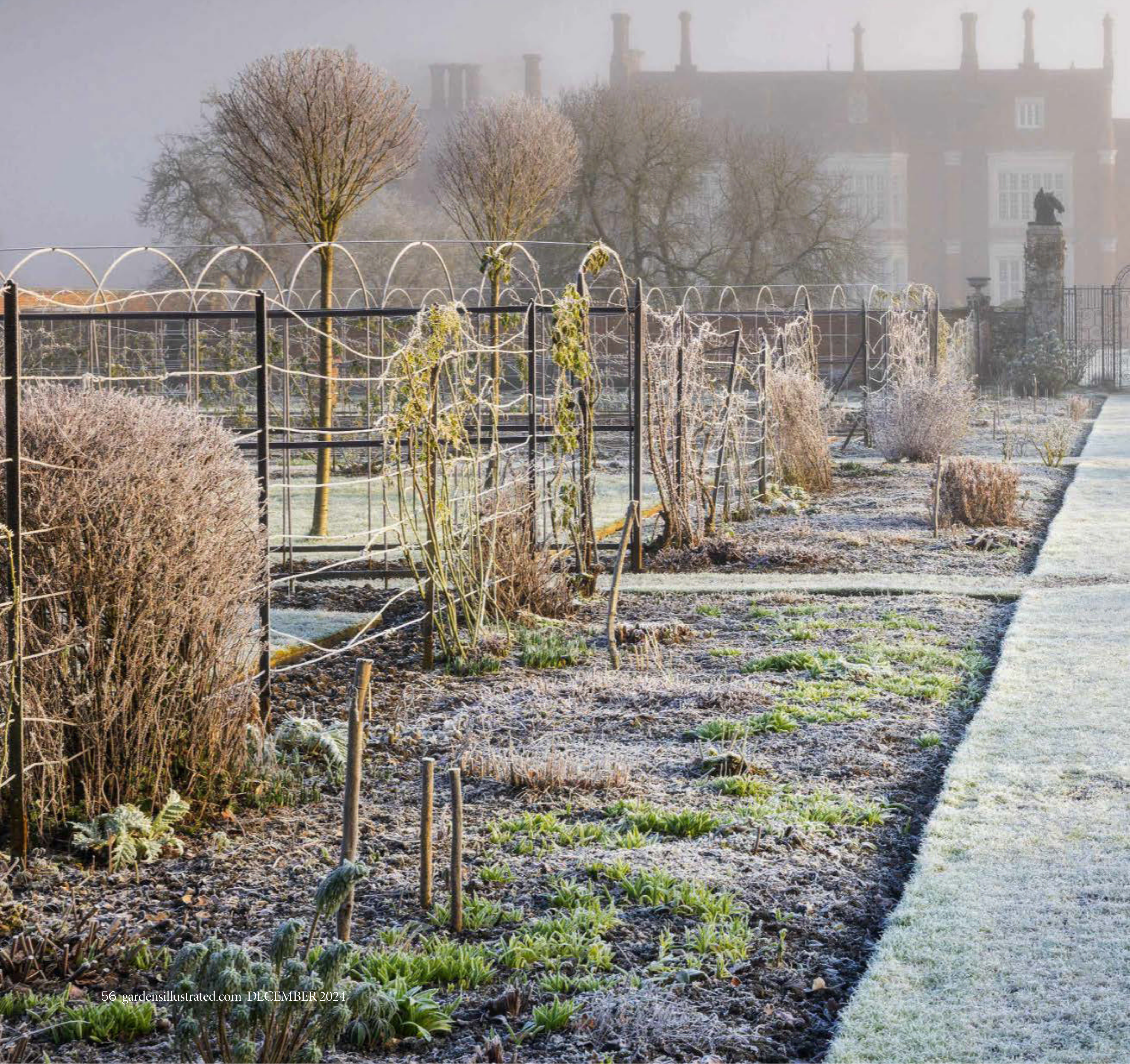
Helmingham is iconic, unique and totally captivating – a house surrounded by a 20m-wide moat, it oozes history and beauty

▷ it's still and crisp. Even though we get some brutal easterly winds, there is a real magic to this place." For Sophie, much of the winter beauty is the collection of trees, both in the immediate garden but also in the wider parkland too. Cedar trees, dotted around, stand majestically in the cold air, as do a range of unusual oaks, huge horse chestnuts and even a substantial eucalyptus. The Woodland Garden (more a fascinating arboretum than wood) houses glades of *Malus* and *Prunus*, each offering interest of habit or bark. The informal symmetry of the Apple Walk, with its 40 well-tended fruit trees and their arching branches, makes an attractive feature against a winter sky.

But of course it's the hedging that really gives definition to a winter visit at Helmingham. Around the Walled Garden's moat, countless *Taxus baccata* domes are trimmed for a clear outline and interesting form. No two are the same, all seeming to welcome human characterisation. "The pruning of the yews takes a good couple of months," explains Sophie. "It's an exacting job, not only for the straight lines of the hedges, but also for the more organic and rounded shapes, as these are the stars of our illuminated winter trail."

On the other side of the house, in the Herb and Knot Garden, low-growing box plants form two patterns: one is of the Tollemache fret pattern; the other is entwined with the letters T and A for Ed's parents. On a crisp winter's day, the outline of the patterns is accentuated and the effect more startling than when surrounded by summer ▷

To continue turn to page 60



The one-acre Walled Garden once provided produce for the whole village and wider community. Today it still supplies the house, café and events, although some of the productive beds have now been given over to cut flowers, wildflower meadows and ornamental planting.

Years of owning the same bit of land, years of gardening, and years of tweaking, mean that the overall layout is superb

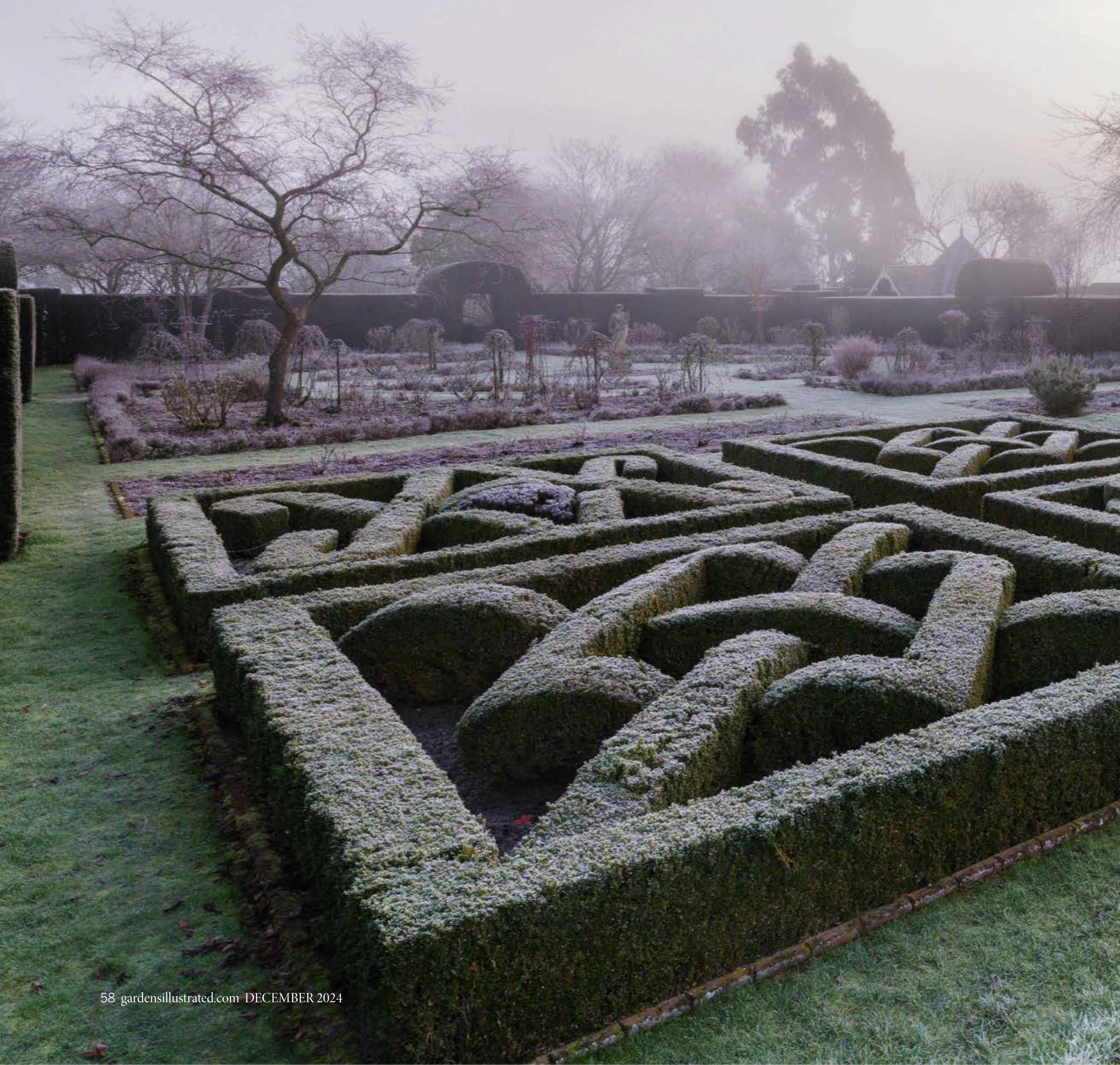
Keeping on top of the trim

For many gardeners, cutting hedges once or twice a year is a chore that might take a couple of hours, but when you have hundreds of metres of them, it takes quite a bit of planning.

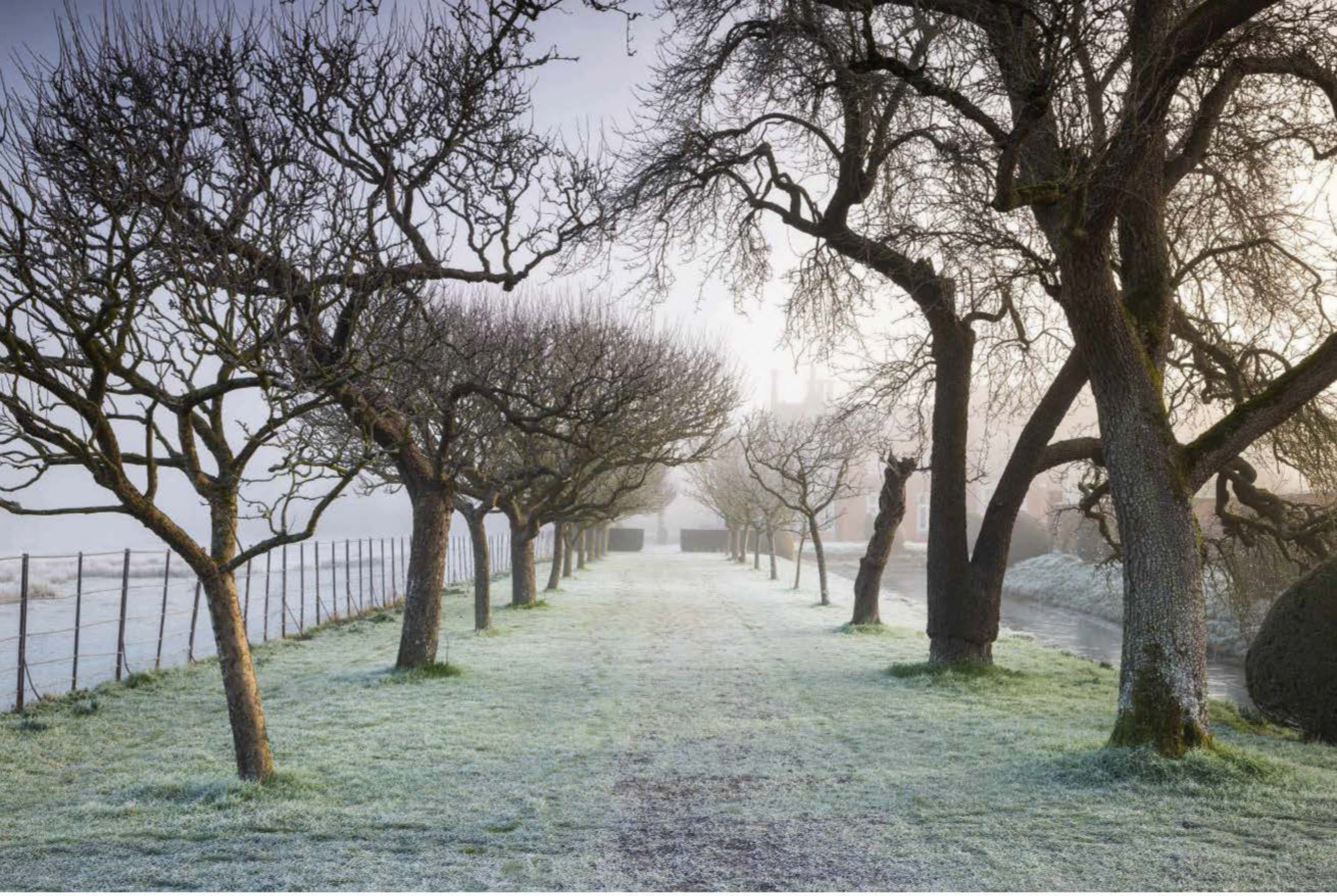
"It takes six to eight weeks to get all the yew pruning done," says Sophie, with gardener Graham Thorpe in charge of the work. "Graham finishes the work at the end of September, as the trees have to be in perfect order for our illuminated walk, which takes place from the middle of November." It's clear that some of the organic shapes are perfect for a winter lights trail.

Recently, the team has switched from using petrol hedge cutters to electric versions, to reduce pollution and noise. "The charge lasts about three full hours," says Sophie, "but as you often stop and start when hedge trimming, the battery can actually last all day." These small steps to electrification are part of ensuring Helmingham continues to look great, while reducing the impact on its resources.

Box hedging is used throughout the garden and even though box-tree moth has been spotted here, the box continues to look happy and healthy, thanks to judicious pruning and ongoing healthcare by the garden team.



What underpins all of the garden are great 'bones' – structure, proportion and scale, all of which are accentuated at this time of year



▷ flowers. As is inevitable nowadays, the issue of box blight or box-tree moth comes up and Sophie gives a knowing look. "We do have the caterpillar," she says, "but we take a pragmatic approach and try to look after the box as well as we can."

Of course, the architecture of Helmingham benefits the whole experience, with the house "being the nucleus of the garden", according to Sophie. But surely, ultimately, it's the moats that add to the experience? The physical act of walking over one of the bridges or drawbridges makes you look down and visually connect with the void beneath. At other times it's the way a simple rising mist – or striking calmness – emanates around the house. It's certainly not miserable or threatening; rather it's all part of the theatre of this spectacular site in this most frigid of seasons.

There is theatre in abundance with topiary and statuary. "The Topiary Border in the Walled Garden has some really fun *Buxus* shapes in it," Sophie explains. Expertly topiarised by gardener Chris Reeve, the snails or snowmen make for a dash of humour in the winter light. In a great gardening nod, Xa even created one topiary called 'Gertrude Jekyll's boot'.

Statuary is used around the garden too – from stone eagles on a corner of the Walled Garden to a pair of cast-iron statues of Pegasus (the winged horse of Greek mythology) at its entrance to the to a modern DNA helix sculpture by Pete Moorhouse. These sculptures are not everywhere – and all the better for it. Their sporadic but considered inclusion ensures that when you do come across them, they feel special.

There's no doubt that Sophie is well aware of her parents-in-law's legacy – and living down the road, they are constantly on hand for advice. Having done her RHS Level 2 in horticulture, Sophie doesn't want to be seen as the next Xa. But she is passionate about what she can help to deliver for the garden, as the reality of the changing climate and its impact on planting sets in, as well as how to deliver a garden, business and home as sustainably as possible.

For all the work that those generations before Ed and Sophie have done, there is still so much more to do. And winter is the perfect time to think, reflect, plan and enjoy the bones of one of England's greatest private gardens. ◻

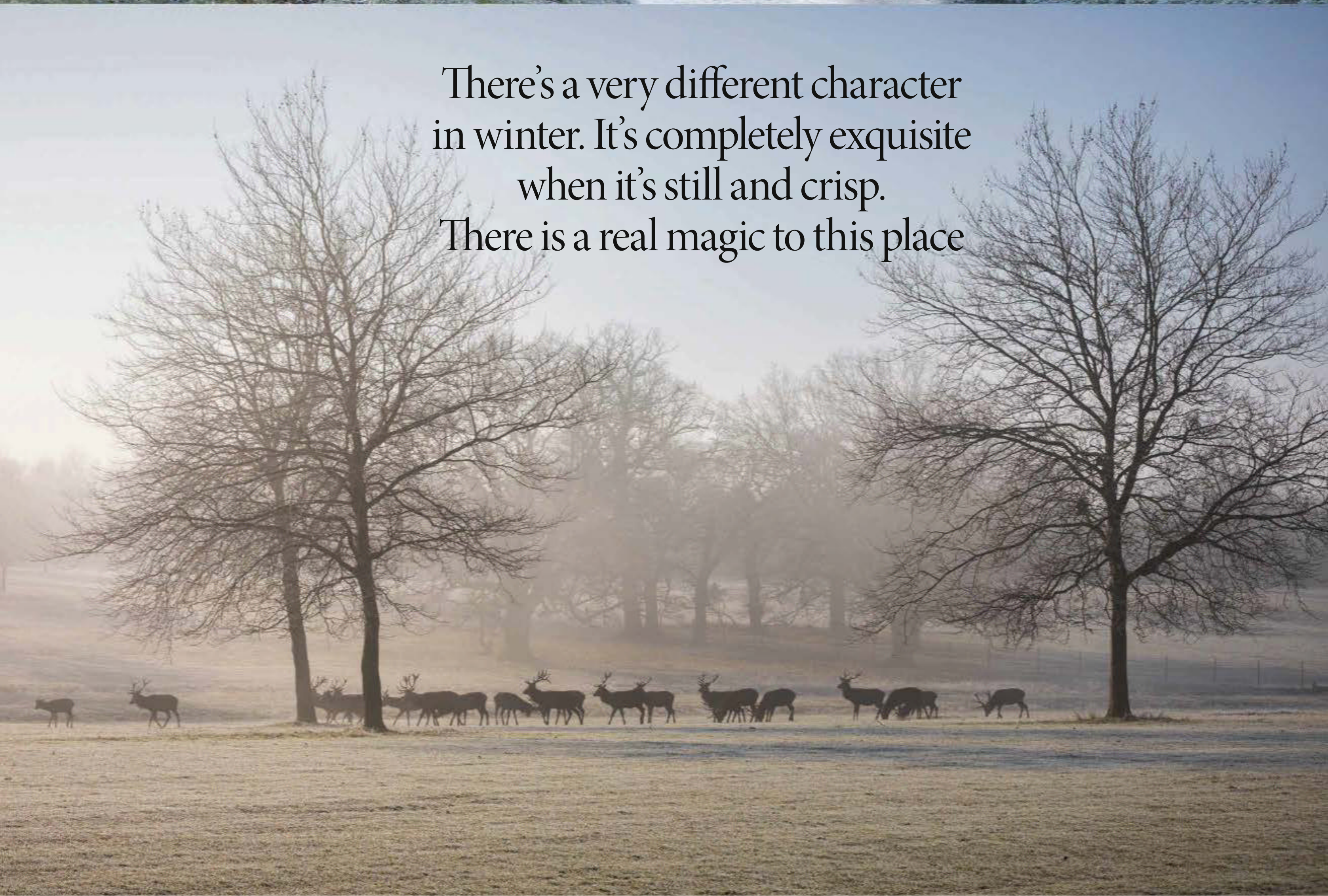
USEFUL INFORMATION

Address Helmingham Hall, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 6EF. **Tel** 01473 890799. **Web** helmingham.com **Open** May – September. This year's Illuminated Garden Trail runs until 18 December. See website for details, and for all opening times and ticket prices.

Above The Apple Walk, on the northern flank of the Walled Garden, edges the moat. There are more than 40 apple trees, made up of several cultivars including 'Worcester Pearmain', 'Egremont Russet' and 'Lord Derby'.

Right above An ancient bridge links the Walled Garden to the Apple Walk. Helmingham Hall is unusual in having moats around both the hall itself and the productive garden – the latter to protect crops from animals (and, possibly, thieves).

Right below Red deer roam much of the wider estate, which is mostly relatively flat parkland dotted with an array of trees, including oaks and huge horse chestnuts.



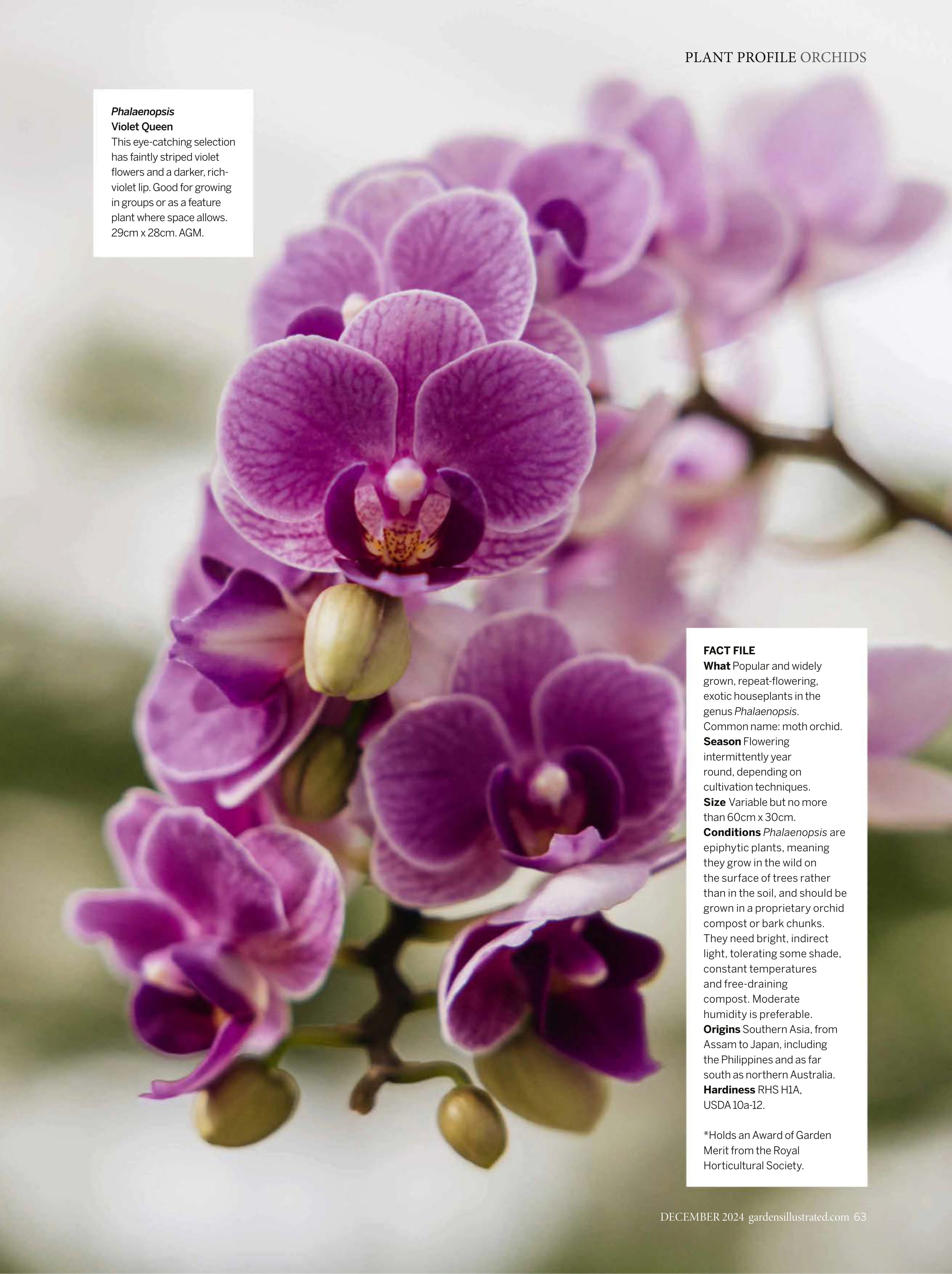
There's a very different character in winter. It's completely exquisite when it's still and crisp. There is a real magic to this place

***Phalaenopsis* Puppy**
The bright-white flowers of this compact orchid have daintily golden speckled centres that are held above glossy green leaves. Height and spread: 40cm x 30cm. AGM*.

MOTH ORCHIDS

Add colour to the winter months with these delicate houseplants that offer exotic, long-lasting flowers, and are easier to look after than you may think

WORDS **MATTHEW BIGGS** PHOTOGRAPHS **ÉVA NÉMETH**



***Phalaenopsis* Violet Queen**
This eye-catching selection has faintly striped violet flowers and a darker, rich-violet lip. Good for growing in groups or as a feature plant where space allows. 29cm x 28cm. AGM.

FACT FILE

What Popular and widely grown, repeat-flowering, exotic houseplants in the genus *Phalaenopsis*. Common name: moth orchid.

Season Flowering intermittently year round, depending on cultivation techniques.

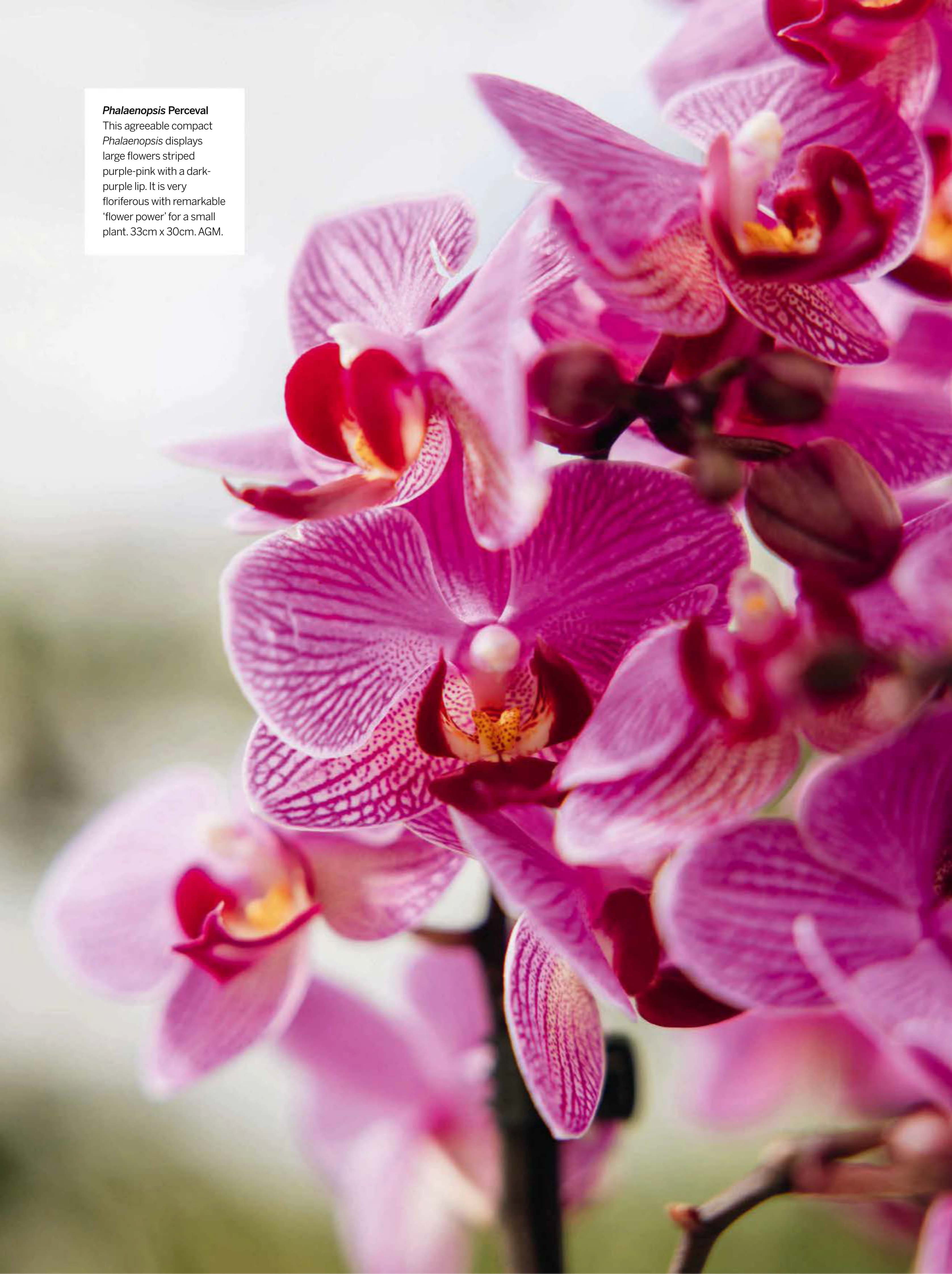
Size Variable but no more than 60cm x 30cm.

Conditions *Phalaenopsis* are epiphytic plants, meaning they grow in the wild on the surface of trees rather than in the soil, and should be grown in a proprietary orchid compost or bark chunks. They need bright, indirect light, tolerating some shade, constant temperatures and free-draining compost. Moderate humidity is preferable.

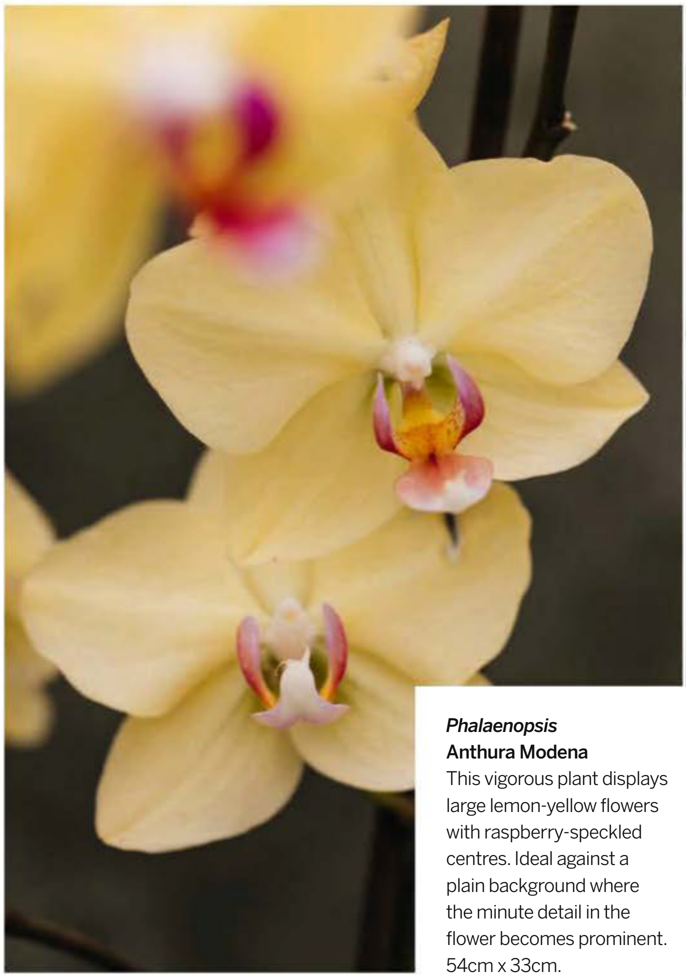
Origins Southern Asia, from Assam to Japan, including the Philippines and as far south as northern Australia.

Hardiness RHS H1A, USDA 10a-12.

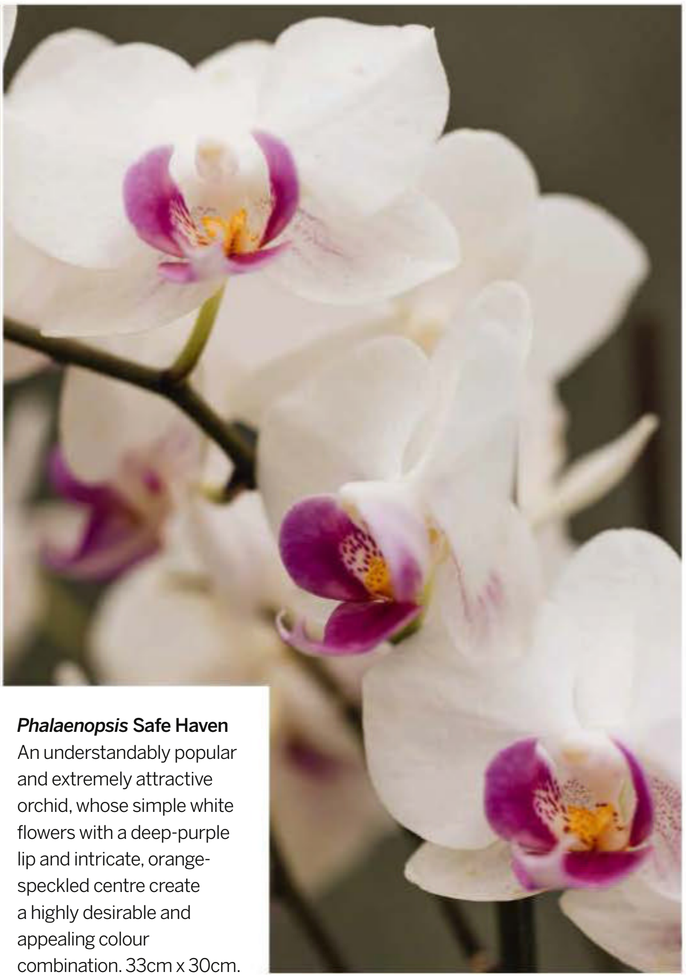
*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.



***Phalaenopsis* Perceval**
This agreeable compact *Phalaenopsis* displays large flowers striped purple-pink with a dark-purple lip. It is very floriferous with remarkable 'flower power' for a small plant. 33cm x 30cm. AGM.



***Phalaenopsis* Anthura Modena**
This vigorous plant displays large lemon-yellow flowers with raspberry-speckled centres. Ideal against a plain background where the minute detail in the flower becomes prominent. 54cm x 33cm.



***Phalaenopsis* Safe Haven**
An understandably popular and extremely attractive orchid, whose simple white flowers with a deep-purple lip and intricate, orange-speckled centre create a highly desirable and appealing colour combination. 33cm x 30cm.

With their large, exotic blooms, usually in shades of pink, white or yellow, and with an array of flower forms and patterns, *Phalaenopsis*, or moth orchids, are popular houseplants. They're easy to grow, can flower for several months and with the correct care, will repeat flower and last for years. Today, you can pick up a moth orchid at the supermarket, so it's hard to imagine that the cultivation of orchids was once the domain of the aristocracy. The discovery of the genus *Phalaenopsis*, which was easy to breed and grow, changed that.

Phalaenopsis was first described in 1825 by the Dutch botanist Carl Ludwig Blume on the Indonesian island of Nusa Kambangan near Java; it is said that during one of his expeditions, he noticed what he thought was a group of butterflies floating motionless among the trees. At the time, prices of orchids were at a premium, and plant hunters were busy scouring rainforests for botanical treasures, often at great personal risk. John Lindley named two species in his *Gardeners' Chronicle* of 1848, which were *Phalaenopsis rosea* (now *P. equestris*), the 'pink butterfly plant' introduced by collector Thomas Lobb from Manila through Veitch's Nursery; and *P. grandiflora* (now *P. amabilis*), with white, fragrant flowers.

Moth orchids soon became more popular than the previous favourite, the *Cymbidium* orchid, which only flowered once a year, had grassy foliage that looked dull for most of the year and took up too much space. *Phalaenopsis* were more compact, flowered for months and were tolerant of a wider range of conditions, and soon became staple houseplants for every home.

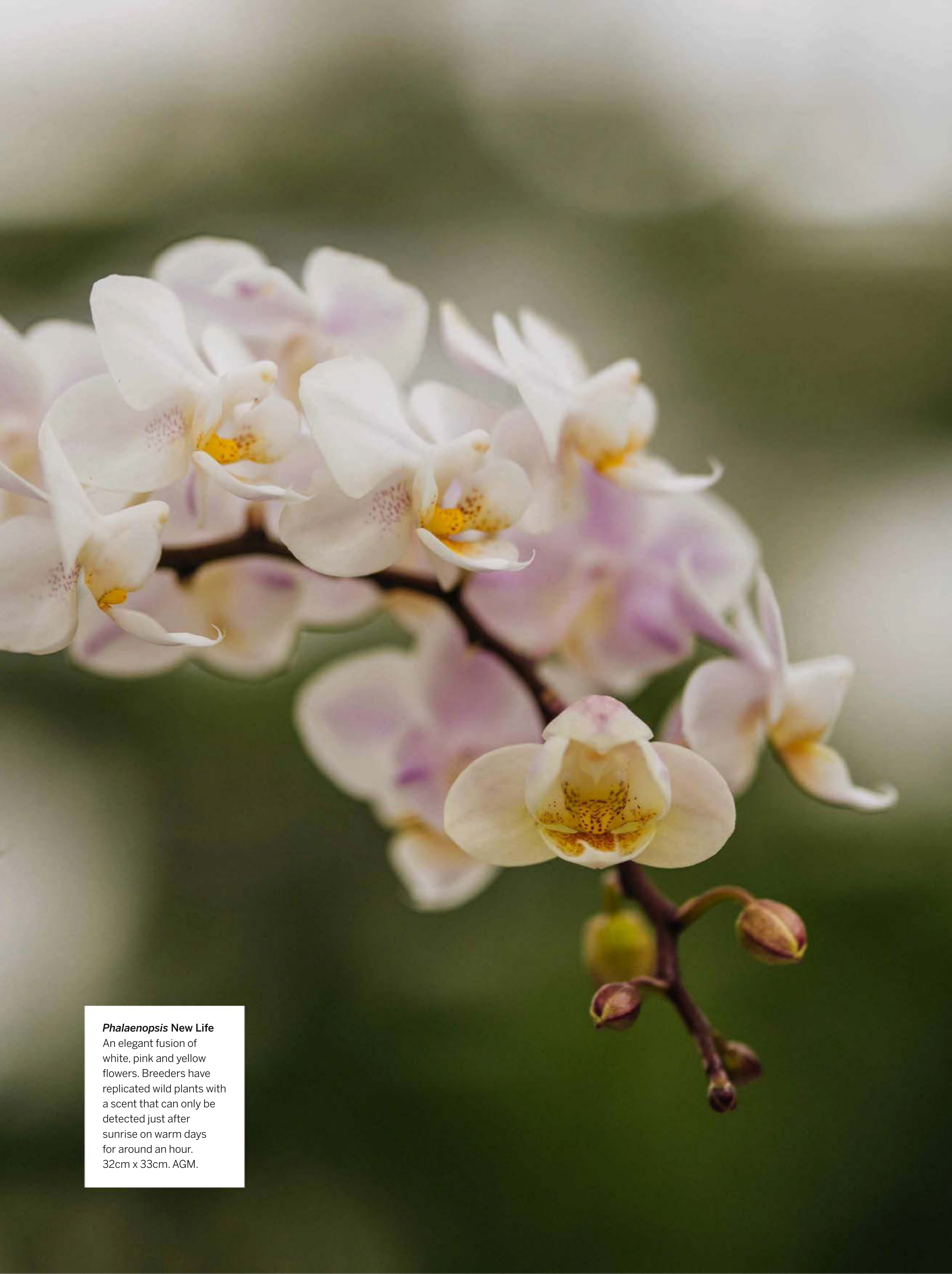
Around 80 species of *Phalaenopsis* grow in the wild, from Assam in India to Indonesia and the Philippines, and hybrids are virtually unknown in nature – humans have mixed and matched across all the species to produce the extraordinary variety of forms, colours and patterns available today. Now extensively bred in Thailand, Taiwan and the Netherlands, where they are hybridised and grown by the million in glasshouses, there are well over 34,000 hybrids of *Phalaenopsis* registered with the Royal Horticultural Society. Some 30 species are fragrant but only a handful are strongly scented.

If you want to grow a moth orchid successfully at home, it pays to know that they hail from tropical climates and are epiphytes, found perched on accumulations of organic matter on rocks and trees. Their aerial roots absorb moisture and nutrients from rainfall, the atmosphere and water filtering through the organic matter above. Plants growing under the jungle canopy in deep shade are far more robust than those found in bright sun.

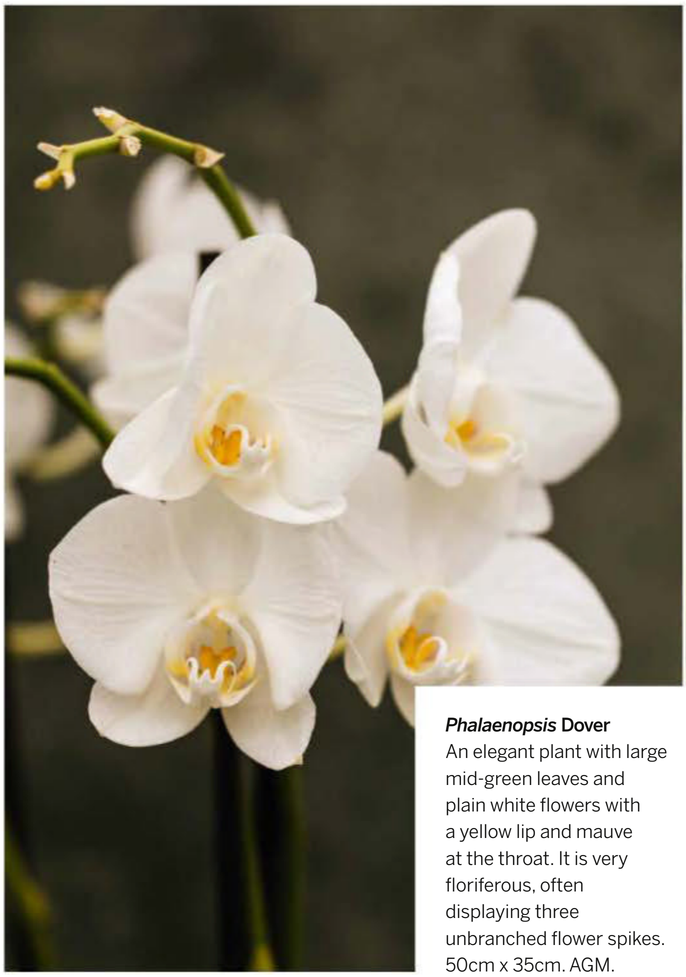
> If you want to grow a moth orchid, it pays to know that they hail from tropical climates and are epiphytes

Mimic these conditions by growing your moth orchid in bright light, where it receives some direct sunshine in the early morning or late evening – a windowsill is

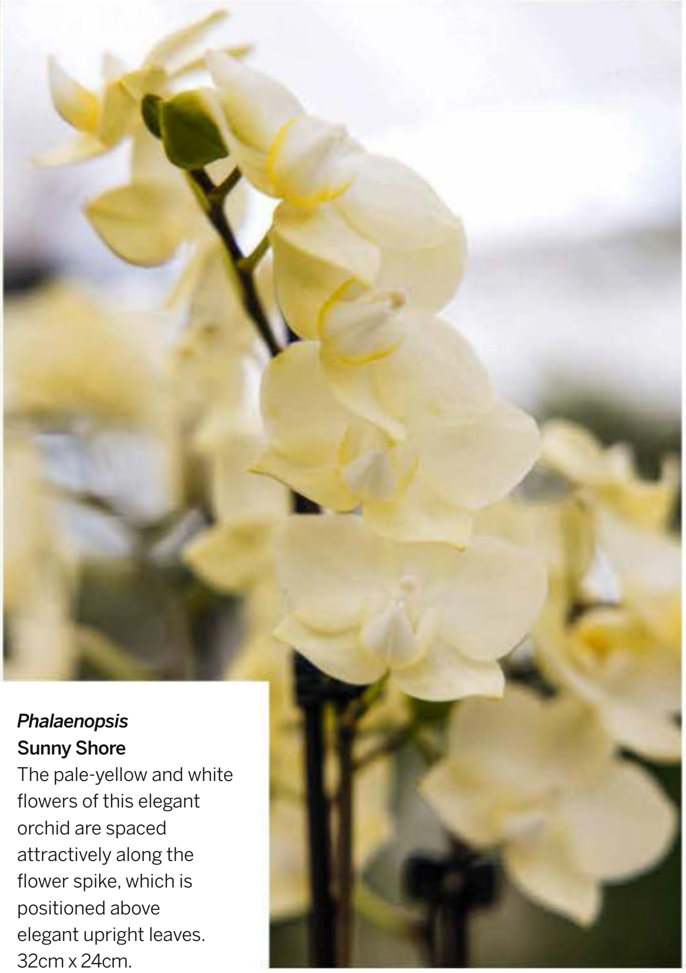
To continue turn to page 69 ▷



***Phalaenopsis* New Life**
An elegant fusion of white, pink and yellow flowers. Breeders have replicated wild plants with a scent that can only be detected just after sunrise on warm days for around an hour. 32cm x 33cm. AGM.



***Phalaenopsis* Dover**
An elegant plant with large mid-green leaves and plain white flowers with a yellow lip and mauve at the throat. It is very floriferous, often displaying three unbranched flower spikes. 50cm x 35cm. AGM.



***Phalaenopsis* Sunny Shore**
The pale-yellow and white flowers of this elegant orchid are spaced attractively along the flower spike, which is positioned above elegant upright leaves. 32cm x 24cm.

How to grow *Phalaenopsis*

- **Grow in bright light** in a spot that gets a little direct early morning or late evening sun. A windowsill is ideal. Keep away from radiators and draughts, and bring in from behind curtains at night; low temperatures can cause buds and flowers to drop. Plants withstand temperatures down to 10-12ºC but a minimum of 15ºC is ideal.

- **Grow in an orchid compost or in 50mm to 1cm bark chunks** to allow airflow around the roots, improve drainage and prevent rot. Clear plastic pots make it easier to check the colour of the roots – green roots are hydrated, while silvery ones need watering – and can be hidden in an outer ornamental pot. Water regularly rather than wait for the roots to dry out and change colour. Brown dead roots can be snipped off and there is no harm in trimming roots when repotting. Both roots and leaves photosynthesise so green tints to the roots are not a cause for alarm.

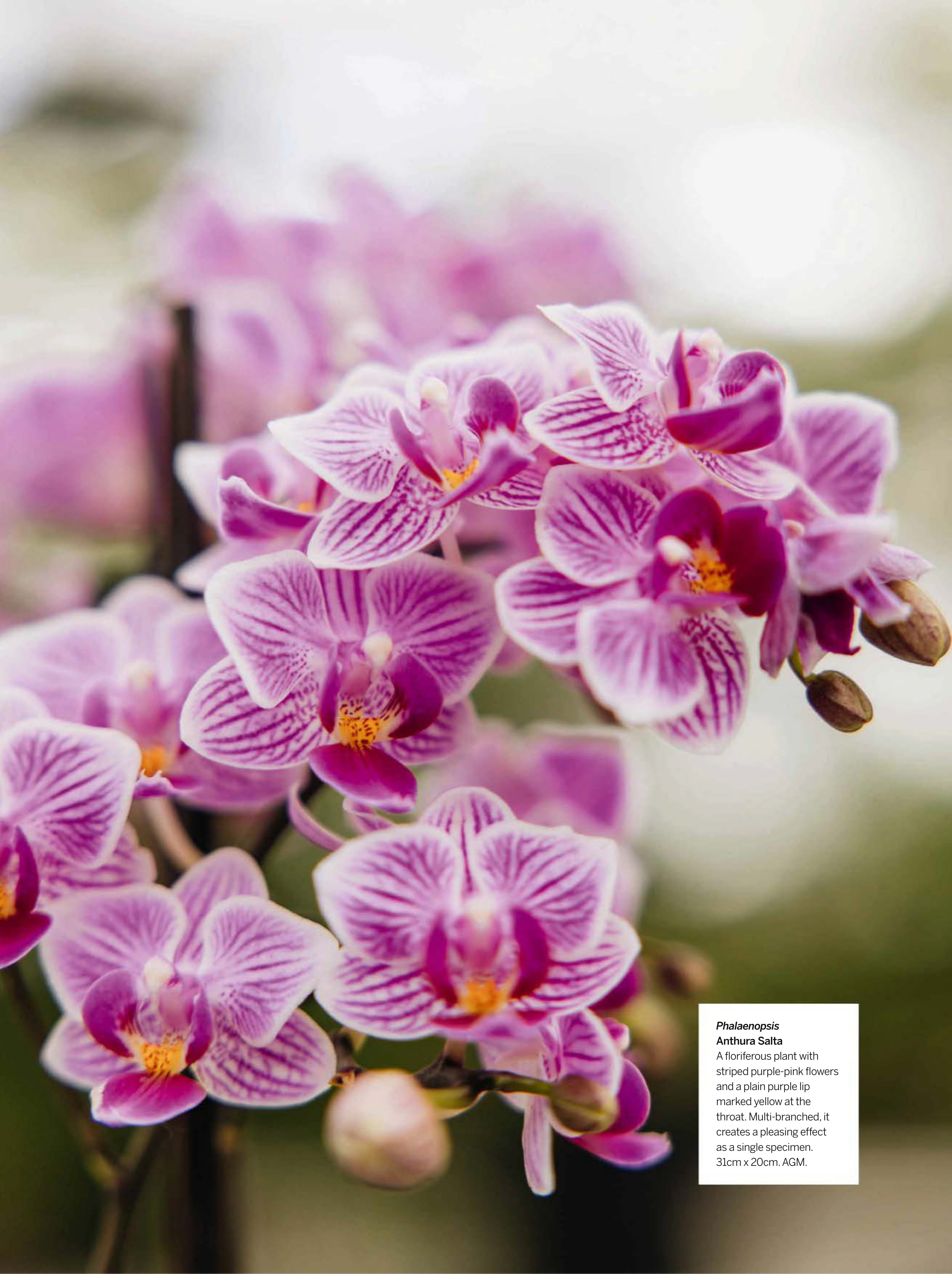
- **Water around every two weeks** from spring to autumn, then reduce in winter. Tepid rainwater is preferable but they will tolerate tap water. Trickle water into the top of the pot to moisten the bark and roots, avoiding the ‘crown’, then allow to drain. Or plunge in water for ten minutes, shake away excess or allow to drain. Never let them stand in water. Many people kill orchids by overwatering.

- **Feed during the growing season** with a specialist orchid feed or half-strength houseplant feed. Omit the feed every fourth watering to flush out excess salts.

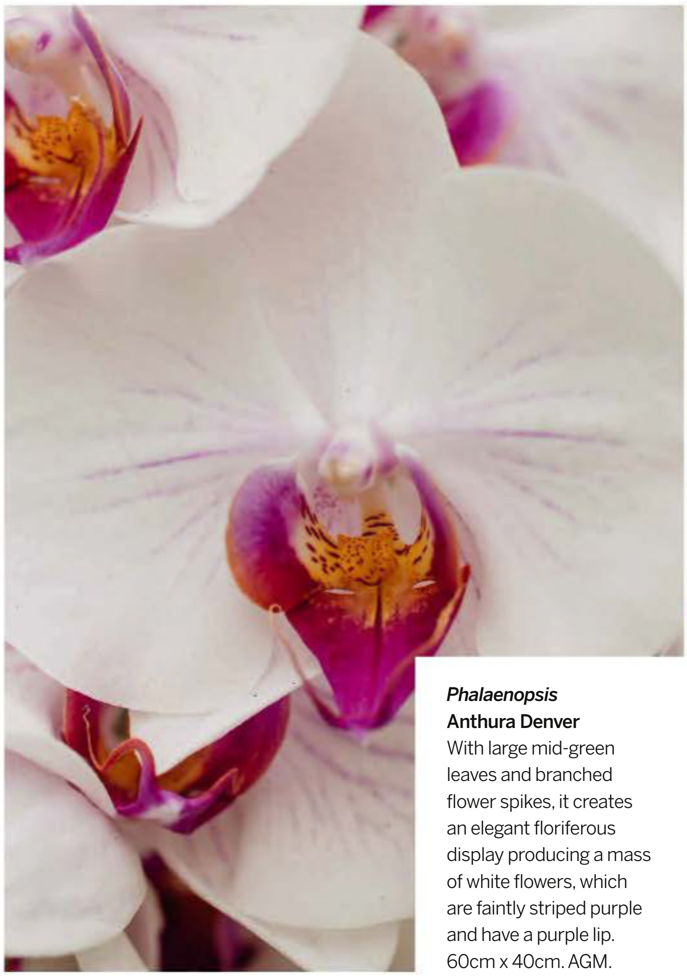
- **Re-pot at any time of year, but only once a plant is too large for its container** or when the compost decomposes – usually after around two years. Roots growing outside the pot are simply replicating growth in the wild. Pots full of roots also prevent overwatering in winter.

- **Plants flower at least once annually, and last for years,** so don’t bin plants after flowering. Sacrifice the last flower and cut the main flowering stem to just above the third or fourth node. Keep at around 5ºC lower for a month; this will hopefully encourage a secondary flower spike with new flowers. Only do this once, because trying again will stress the plant. Alternatively, cut the stem down to below the last bud. This allows the plant to recover so the new flowering spike is much more vigorous, with larger, longer-lasting blooms.

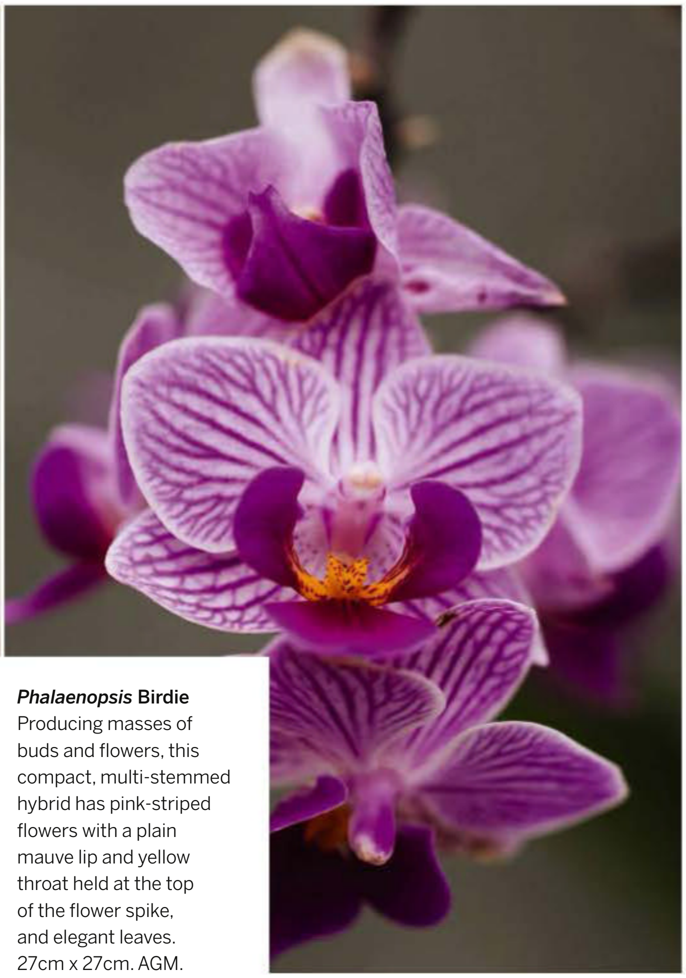
- **Dryness at the roots causes flaccid leaves.** Existing leaves may not recover but fresh new leaves emerge after watering. White, fluffy mealybugs at the leaf bases need to be dealt with promptly. The RHS Orchid Committee advises picking these off by hand. You could also try an environmentally friendly spray.



Phalaenopsis
Anthura Salta
A floriferous plant with striped purple-pink flowers and a plain purple lip marked yellow at the throat. Multi-branched, it creates a pleasing effect as a single specimen. 31cm x 20cm. AGM.



***Phalaenopsis* Anthura Denver**
With large mid-green leaves and branched flower spikes, it creates an elegant floriferous display producing a mass of white flowers, which are faintly striped purple and have a purple lip. 60cm x 40cm. AGM.



***Phalaenopsis* Birdie**
Producing masses of buds and flowers, this compact, multi-stemmed hybrid has pink-striped flowers with a plain mauve lip and yellow throat held at the top of the flower spike, and elegant leaves. 27cm x 27cm. AGM.

▷ ideal. Temperatures should be as consistent as possible – 20-30°C during the day and 15-20°C at night. Ideally, you should even transport your new moth orchid from shop to car in a protective sleeve, particularly in cold weather. Grow *Phalaenopsis* in proprietary orchid compost or bark chunks. These allow airflow around the roots, improve drainage and prevent root rot.

Despite being named, moth orchids are often found in garden centres labelled only with their colour. *Phalaenopsis* Yellow Lightning displays yellow flowers with feathered pale-red edges and darker centres, while *P.* Picasso has white flowers with dark-burgundy centres and scattered burgundy spots, and a burgundy-orange lip with white-yellow edge to the side lobes (no two flowers are identical). *P.* Alassio has bright, yellow-green blooms with an orange-and-white lip above the dark-green leaves.

Few houseplants can compete with the showiness of a moth orchid's flowers, so complement the beauty of *Phalaenopsis* with delicate ferns, such as *Adiantum fragrans*, the coloured foliage of begonias or prayer plants (*Maranta leuconeura*) for a touch of the tropics. Detaching the stems from the vertical canes allows the flowering spikes to arch gracefully, displaying their natural elegance.

The popularity and wide availability of *Phalaenopsis* has encouraged a new method of assessing plants by the RHS Trials Team and Orchid Committee, which is currently trialling 20 different hybrids, numbering 220 plants, from April 2024 to July 2025. Some are being grown in their glasshouse at Wisley, but around 150 are being grown by volunteers – ranging from experienced houseplant growers to new gardeners – in their homes, as part of a citizen science experiment. Control groups are being grown by the RHS in offices and glasshouses. Most of the orchids already hold the prestigious RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM), and the trials will confirm their qualities. Three more could gain an RHS AGM if they show the required all-round performance. ❐

> Few houseplants can compete with the showiness of a moth orchid, so complement their beauty with ferns

Matthew Biggs is a garden writer and broadcaster.

Where to buy and see

- **Burnham Nurseries** Forches Cross, Newton Abbot, Devon TQ12 6PZ. Tel 01626 352233, orchids.uk.com
- **Laurence Hobbs Orchids** Bailiffs Cottage Nursery, Hophurst Lane, Crawley Down, West Sussex RH10 4LN. Tel 01293 561029, laurencehobbsorchids.co.uk
- **Love Orchids** loveorchids.co.uk
- **The Glasshouse, RHS Garden Wisley**, Wisley Lane, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. Tel 01483 224234, rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley

MANY THANKS TO RHS GARDEN WISLEY IN SURREY WHERE THESE IMAGES WERE TAKEN

JANE SCOTTER

The biodynamic grower on the pains and pleasures of hard work, the joys of producing culinary 'fairy dust' and on being part of the bigger picture

WORDS **NATASHA GOODFELLOW** PORTRAIT **LISA LINDER**

On the day we speak, Jane Scotter is in her flat near Heckfield Home Farm, on the 400-acre estate that supplies the renowned Heckfield Place hotel in Hampshire. "I've had a sort of change of life," she says. "I'd been a consultant here for about six years when they offered me the position of head grower, and I thought, why not? I'd recently become a grandmother and needed to be in London a lot more, and I realised that my experience and expertise could be put to much better use here than digging leeks out of frozen ground."

She's certainly done more than her fair share of that. In 1996, Jane left her job as a partner in Neal's Yard Dairy and upped sticks to Herefordshire, where she bought Fern Verrow, a smallholding with a small farmhouse dating back to 1732, with the idea of growing fruit and vegetables. "It was a purely romantic notion," says Jane. "I'd only ever grown houseplants before – and those, badly."

With no other income, there was no question that the plan had to work, so Jane and her then partner set about figuring out how to farm organically. After a first season experimenting, they approached organisations including the Soil Association, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Biodynamic Association for help, and it was the latter that helped them most.

> SOMEONE ASKED WHAT I'D DO WHEN I RETIRE. I'M NEVER GOING TO RETIRE. WHY STOP DOING SOMETHING I LOVE?

Based on Rudolf Steiner's (of Steiner School fame) philosophies, biodynamic farming is not dissimilar to organic farming in its focus on soil, plant health and biodiversity, but it acknowledges that other elements – water, air, the sun, moon, planets and stars – play an important part too, and seeks to harness their effects.

"When you first read about it, it can sound complicated," says Jane, "but I'm a very practical person and to me, it just makes sense. When you're outside working with plants and seeing how insects and animals and the weather interact, it seems obvious that larger forces are at play. There's always much more to things than we think." Many of the processes required are deliberately slow and time-consuming, which Jane appreciates for the chance for reflection they afford. "You realise you're part of nature and connecting with it," she says.

Within three years the farm was certified biodynamic and Jane was driving down to London every Friday (an eight-hour round trip – "I don't know now how I did that," she says), to sell at markets there. Chefs and food writers, including *Gardens Illustrated* columnist Nigel Slater, were soon waxing lyrical over the vitality and vigour of her produce – a seasonal beauty parade of cabbages and radicchio, rhubarb and tiny broad beans and an enormous variety of squash and apples, to name but a few.

But it was tough going. Jane was working seven days a week, the weather was a constant trial and there were other challenges too. "If there was a protest march and London Bridge was closed, which happened not infrequently, people couldn't get to the market and I'd be left with unsold stock," she says.

Then, one day in 2014, she received a life-changing phone call from vegetable-led chef Skye Gyngell. Skye, formerly of Petersham Nurseries and then just starting out at central London restaurant Spring, was looking for a farm with which to work, in the way that Alice Waters of Chez Panisse in California had pioneered. "It was quite amazing," says Jane. "I loved Skye's approach, and she just wanted me to do what I've always done – and she promised to buy it all."

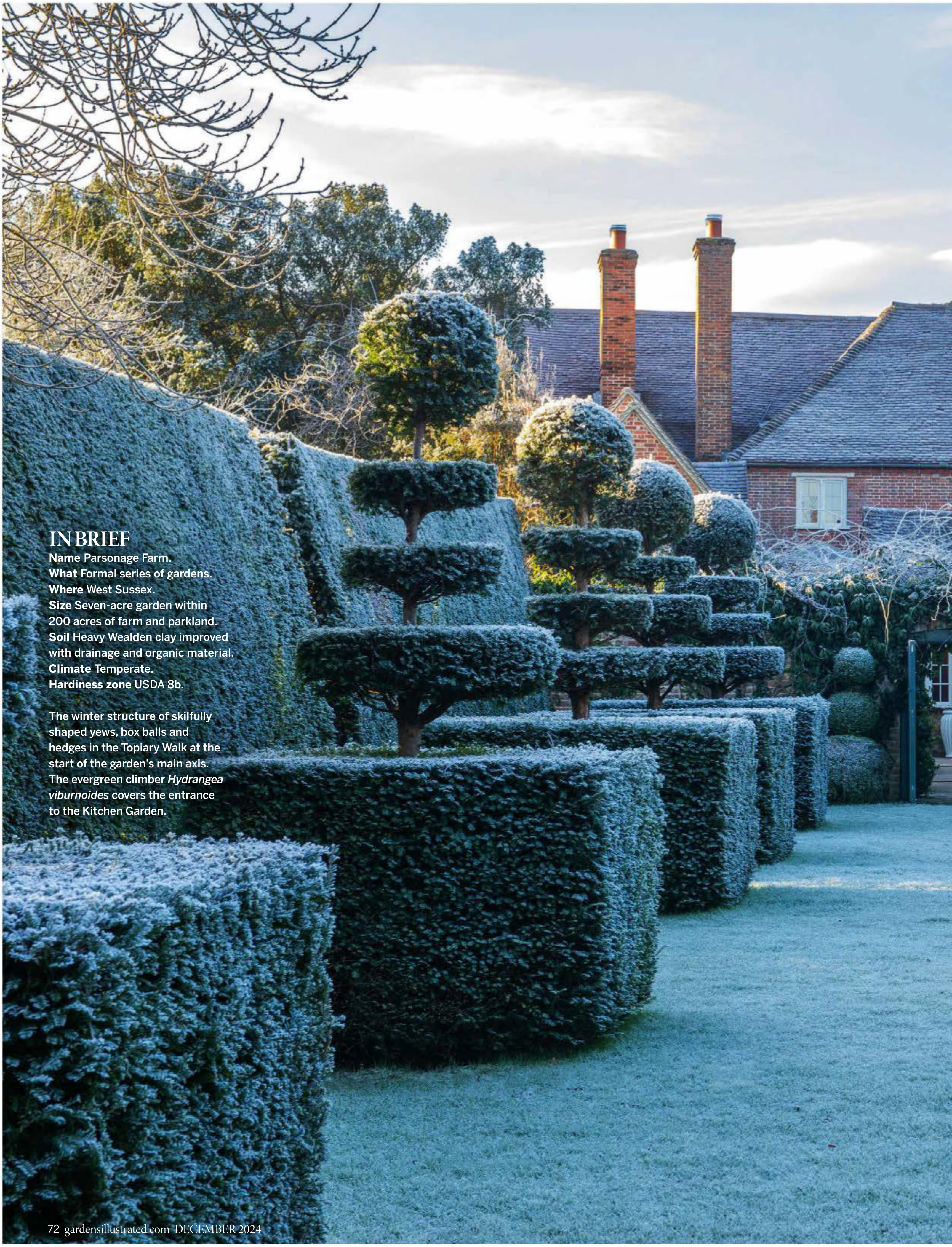
Skye – also culinary director at Heckfield Place – is the reason behind Jane's latest role, and over the years the pair have developed an extraordinary connection that goes far beyond most chef-supplier relationships. "We have very similar thoughts on quality, beauty and the enjoyment of working hard and doing something fantastic," says Jane. "I grow things I think Skye will like that I know she can't get anywhere else, and she sends me pictures of something she's just discovered and asks if I can source seeds. We call it the 'fairy dust' – that extra little something, like white strawberries, green peppercorns or three-coloured amaranth."

Thanks to Jane's direction and input, Heckfield Place was certified biodynamic in 2020 (the UK's first hotel to be so) and she's clearly buzzing at the opportunities her new role affords. "Just as at Fern Verrow, we're striving to be the best biodynamic farm in the country – not to beat anyone else, but because that's what we're passionate about," she says. "We're looking at converting more land, injecting more colour and beauty into the landscape around the farm, and training and development for the team, which is just wonderful."

Slowing down is clearly not on the cards. "Someone asked me the other day what I would do when I retire," says Jane. "I'm never going to retire. Why would I stop doing something I love? The newness – the first potato, the first tomato – the thrill of looking at a field of healthy, beautiful plants it never gets old."

USEFUL INFORMATION

Watch Jane's course on growing produce at createacademy.com, and find out more about her work at heckfieldhomefarm.com



IN BRIEF

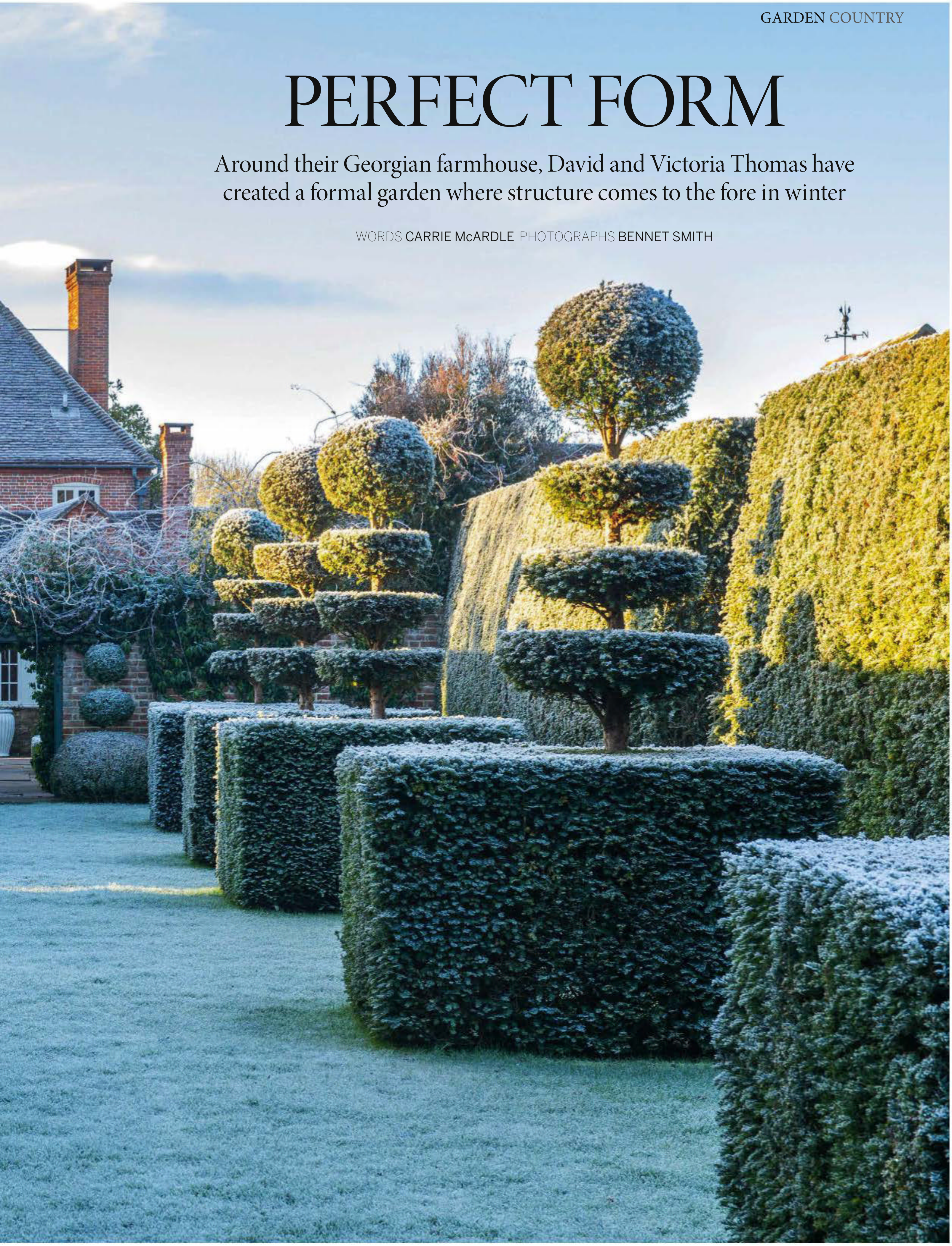
Name Parsonage Farm.
What Formal series of gardens.
Where West Sussex.
Size Seven-acre garden within 200 acres of farm and parkland.
Soil Heavy Wealden clay improved with drainage and organic material.
Climate Temperate.
Hardiness zone USDA 8b.

The winter structure of skilfully shaped yews, box balls and hedges in the Topiary Walk at the start of the garden's main axis. The evergreen climber *Hydrangea viburnoides* covers the entrance to the Kitchen Garden.

PERFECT FORM

Around their Georgian farmhouse, David and Victoria Thomas have created a formal garden where structure comes to the fore in winter

WORDS CARRIE McARDLE PHOTOGRAPHS BENNET SMITH

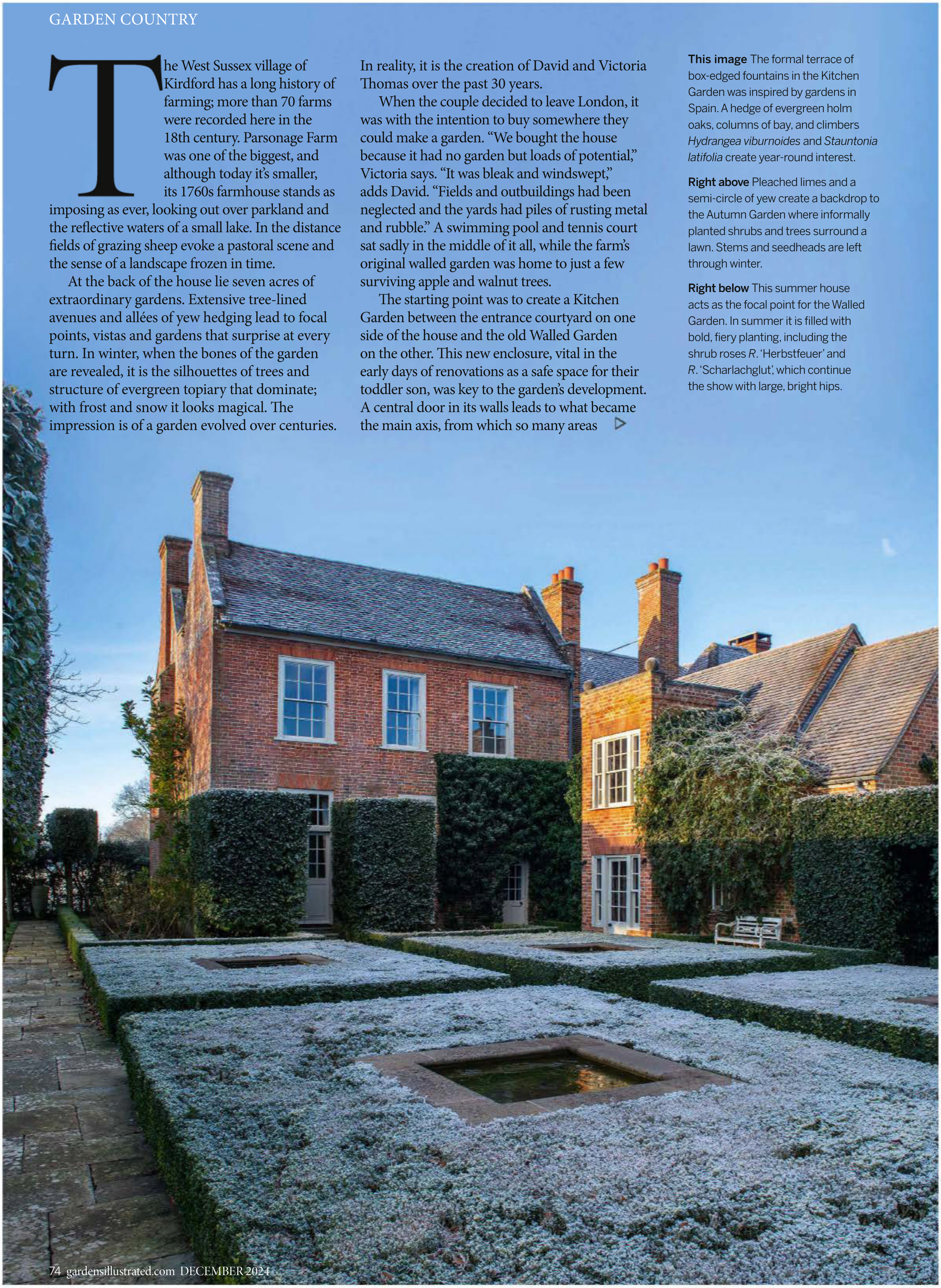


The West Sussex village of Kirdford has a long history of farming; more than 70 farms were recorded here in the 18th century. Parsonage Farm was one of the biggest, and although today it's smaller, its 1760s farmhouse stands as imposing as ever, looking out over parkland and the reflective waters of a small lake. In the distance fields of grazing sheep evoke a pastoral scene and the sense of a landscape frozen in time.

At the back of the house lie seven acres of extraordinary gardens. Extensive tree-lined avenues and allées of yew hedging lead to focal points, vistas and gardens that surprise at every turn. In winter, when the bones of the garden are revealed, it is the silhouettes of trees and structure of evergreen topiary that dominate; with frost and snow it looks magical. The impression is of a garden evolved over centuries. In reality, it is the creation of David and Victoria Thomas over the past 30 years.

When the couple decided to leave London, it was with the intention to buy somewhere they could make a garden. "We bought the house because it had no garden but loads of potential," Victoria says. "It was bleak and windswept," adds David. "Fields and outbuildings had been neglected and the yards had piles of rusting metal and rubble." A swimming pool and tennis court sat sadly in the middle of it all, while the farm's original walled garden was home to just a few surviving apple and walnut trees.

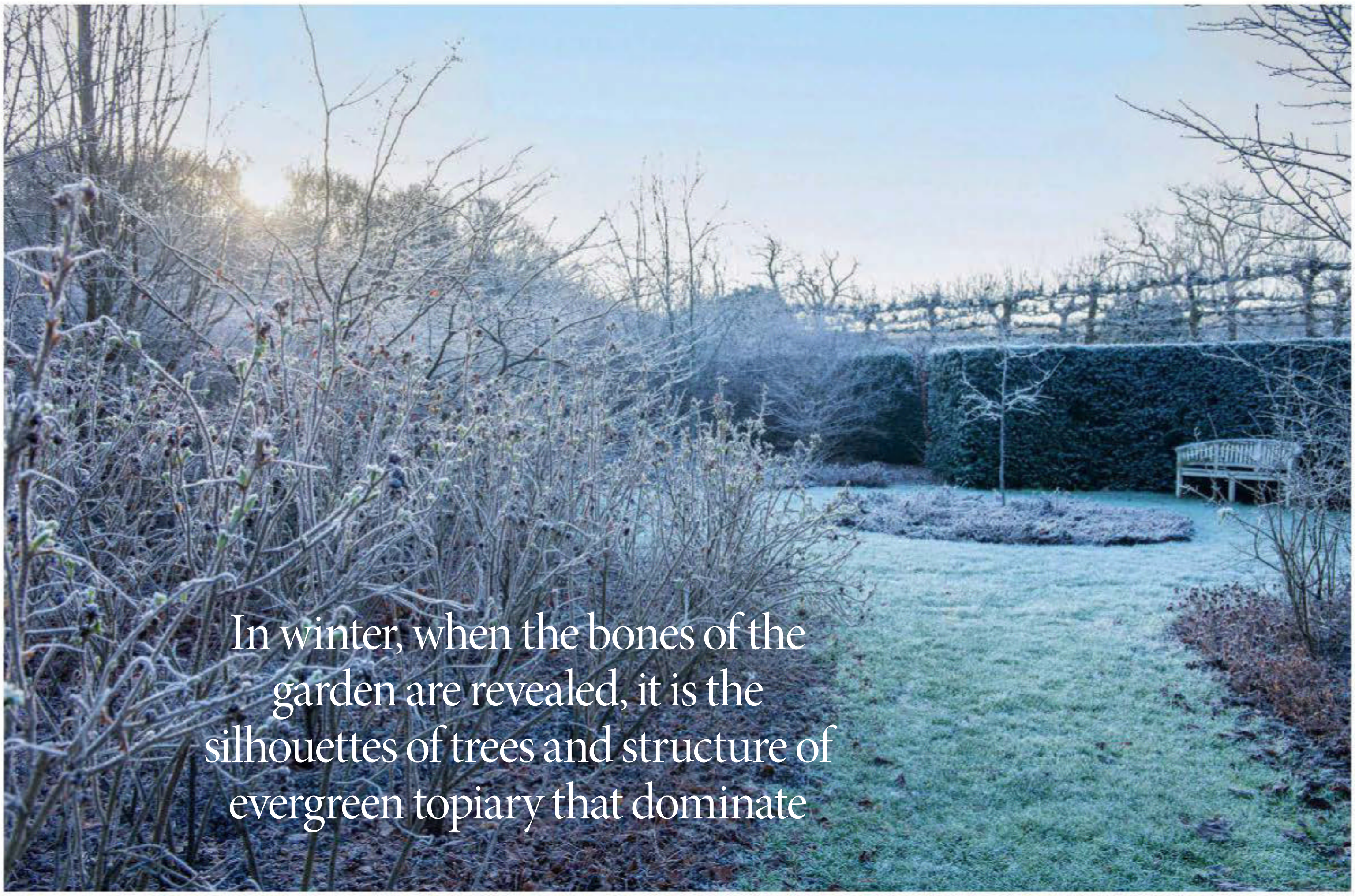
The starting point was to create a Kitchen Garden between the entrance courtyard on one side of the house and the old Walled Garden on the other. This new enclosure, vital in the early days of renovations as a safe space for their toddler son, was key to the garden's development. A central door in its walls leads to what became the main axis, from which so many areas



This image The formal terrace of box-edged fountains in the Kitchen Garden was inspired by gardens in Spain. A hedge of evergreen holm oaks, columns of bay, and climbers *Hydrangea viburnoides* and *Stauntonia latifolia* create year-round interest.

Right above Pleached limes and a semi-circle of yew create a backdrop to the Autumn Garden where informally planted shrubs and trees surround a lawn. Stems and seedheads are left through winter.

Right below This summer house acts as the focal point for the Walled Garden. In summer it is filled with bold, fiery planting, including the shrub roses *R.* 'Herbstfeuer' and *R.* 'Scharlachglut', which continue the show with large, bright hips.



In winter, when the bones of the garden are revealed, it is the silhouettes of trees and structure of evergreen topiary that dominate

▷ of the garden now flow. "Our ideas were for formality and to create a central axis to link house, buildings, tennis court and pool," says David. "We also wanted fruit, for its good looks and because the area has a history of fruit growing."

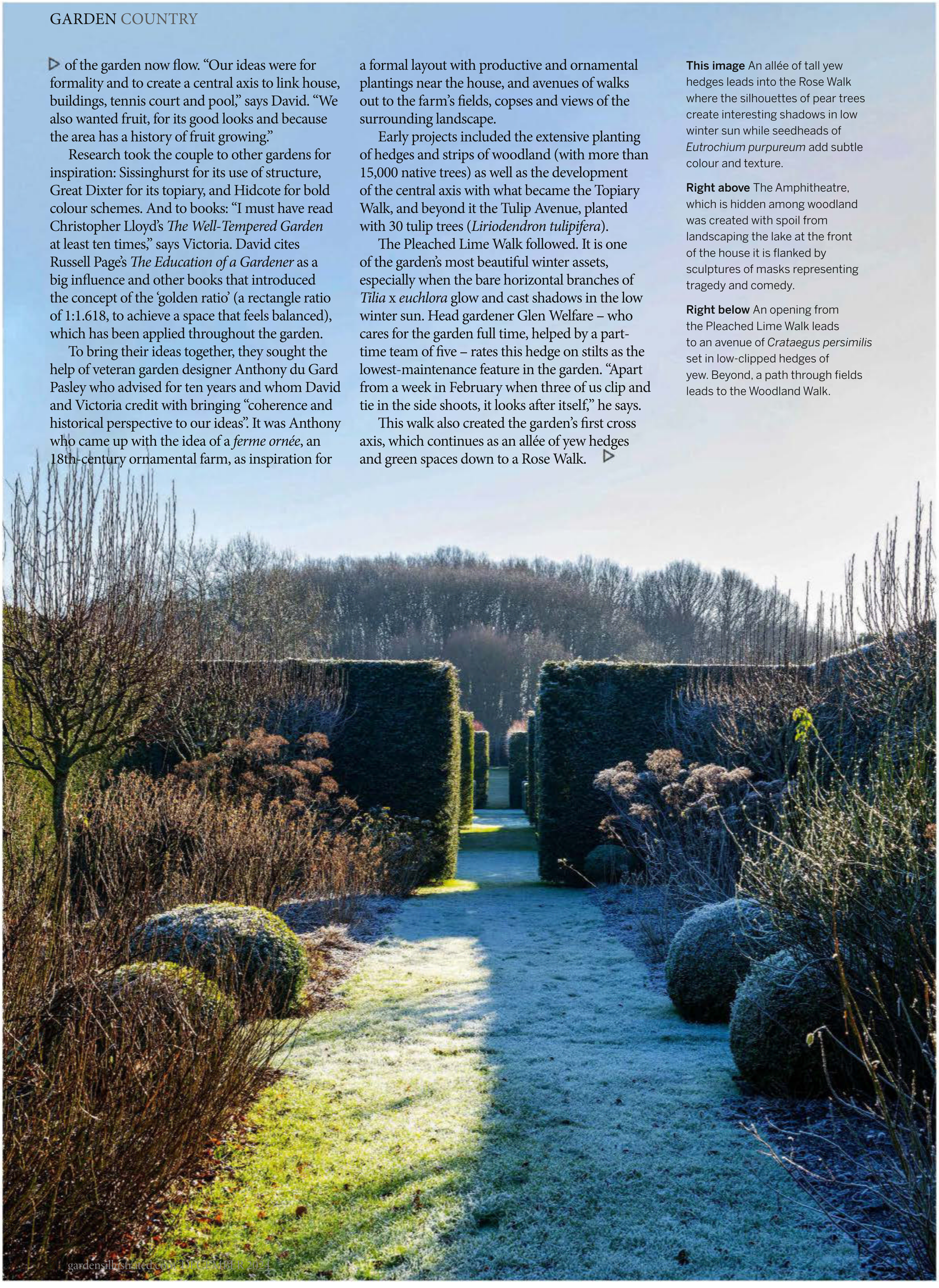
Research took the couple to other gardens for inspiration: Sissinghurst for its use of structure, Great Dixter for its topiary, and Hidcote for bold colour schemes. And to books: "I must have read Christopher Lloyd's *The Well-Tempered Garden* at least ten times," says Victoria. David cites Russell Page's *The Education of a Gardener* as a big influence and other books that introduced the concept of the 'golden ratio' (a rectangle ratio of 1:1.618, to achieve a space that feels balanced), which has been applied throughout the garden.

To bring their ideas together, they sought the help of veteran garden designer Anthony du Gard Pasley who advised for ten years and whom David and Victoria credit with bringing "coherence and historical perspective to our ideas". It was Anthony who came up with the idea of a *ferme ornée*, an 18th-century ornamental farm, as inspiration for a formal layout with productive and ornamental plantings near the house, and avenues of walks out to the farm's fields, copses and views of the surrounding landscape.

Early projects included the extensive planting of hedges and strips of woodland (with more than 15,000 native trees) as well as the development of the central axis with what became the Topiary Walk, and beyond it the Tulip Avenue, planted with 30 tulip trees (*Liriodendron tulipifera*).

The Pleached Lime Walk followed. It is one of the garden's most beautiful winter assets, especially when the bare horizontal branches of *Tilia* x *euchlora* glow and cast shadows in the low winter sun. Head gardener Glen Welfare – who cares for the garden full time, helped by a part-time team of five – rates this hedge on stilts as the lowest-maintenance feature in the garden. "Apart from a week in February when three of us clip and tie in the side shoots, it looks after itself," he says.

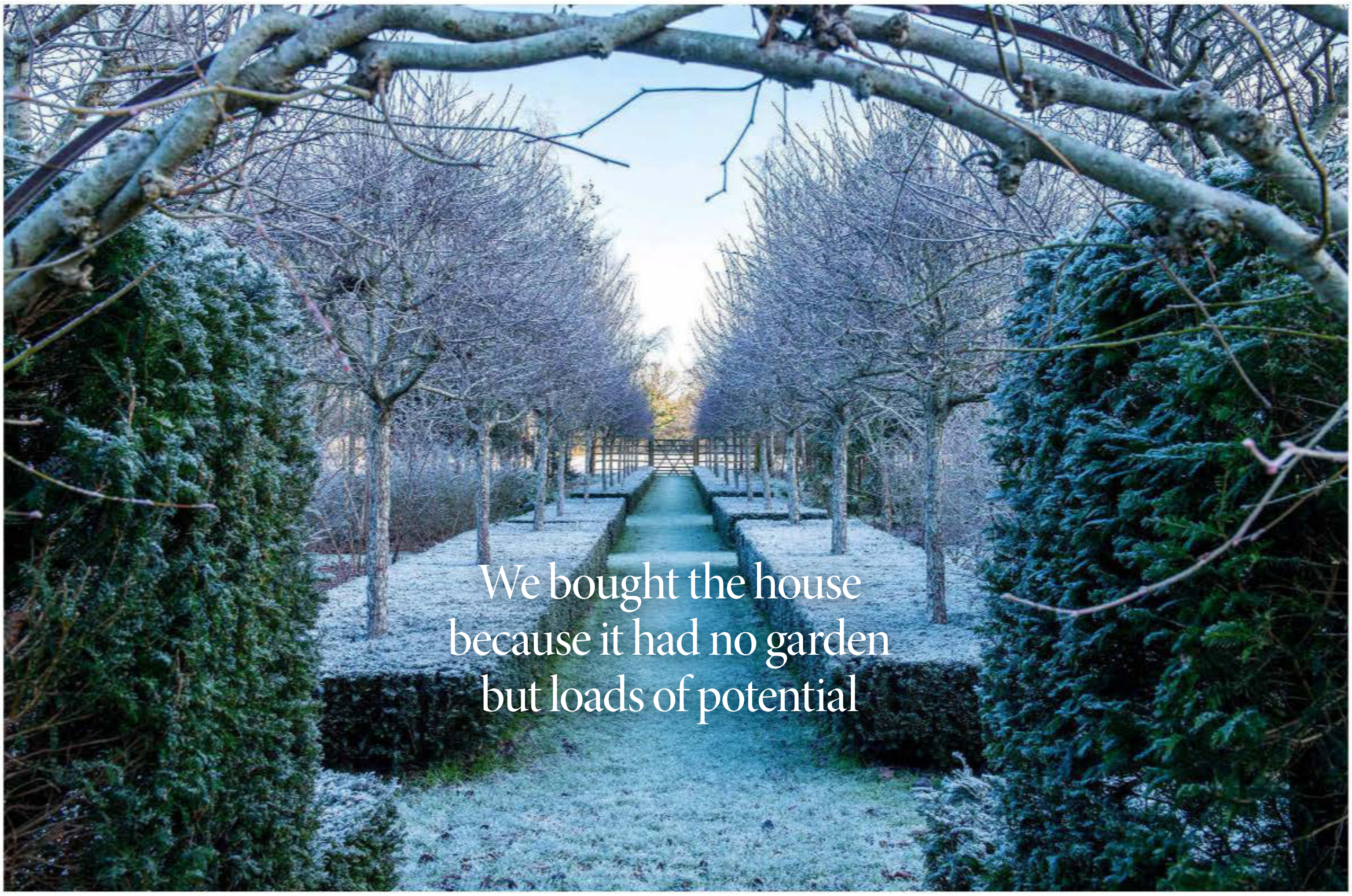
This walk also created the garden's first cross axis, which continues as an allée of yew hedges and green spaces down to a Rose Walk. ▷



This image An allée of tall yew hedges leads into the Rose Walk where the silhouettes of pear trees create interesting shadows in low winter sun while seedheads of *Eutrochium purpureum* add subtle colour and texture.

Right above The Amphitheatre, which is hidden among woodland was created with spoil from landscaping the lake at the front of the house it is flanked by sculptures of masks representing tragedy and comedy.

Right below An opening from the Pleached Lime Walk leads to an avenue of *Crataegus persimilis* set in low-clipped hedges of yew. Beyond, a path through fields leads to the Woodland Walk.



We bought the house because it had no garden but loads of potential

▷ A later, lower, cross axis introduced the extensive Autumn Garden with shrubs and trees informally planted for seasonal colour. Winter interest is also found between the rows of scented evergreen *Mahonia* x *media* 'Winter Sun' and shaped lollipops of the hawthorn, *Crataegus persimilis*.

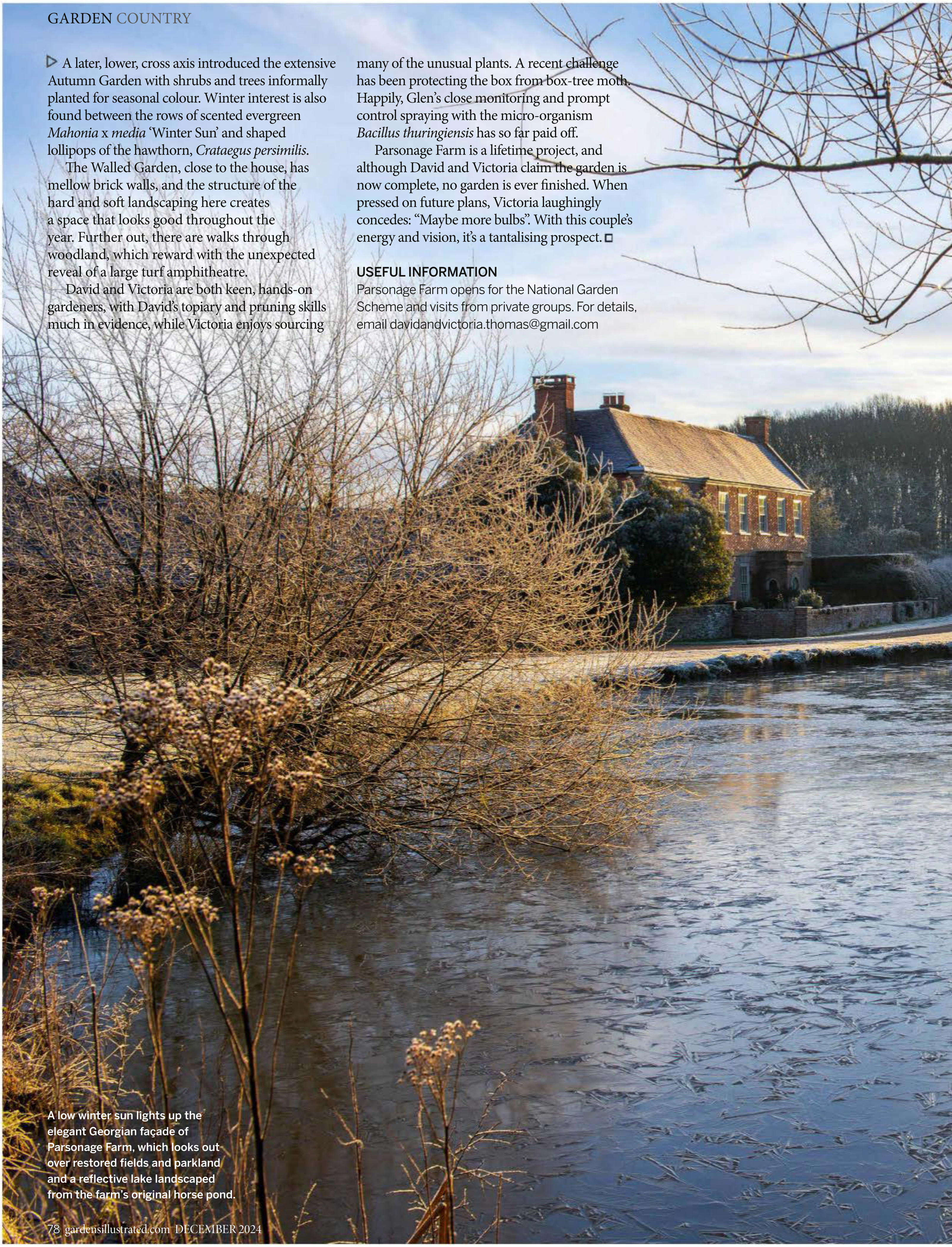
The Walled Garden, close to the house, has mellow brick walls, and the structure of the hard and soft landscaping here creates a space that looks good throughout the year. Further out, there are walks through woodland, which reward with the unexpected reveal of a large turf amphitheatre.

David and Victoria are both keen, hands-on gardeners, with David's topiary and pruning skills much in evidence, while Victoria enjoys sourcing many of the unusual plants. A recent challenge has been protecting the box from box-tree moth. Happily, Glen's close monitoring and prompt control spraying with the micro-organism *Bacillus thuringiensis* has so far paid off.

Parsonage Farm is a lifetime project, and although David and Victoria claim the garden is now complete, no garden is ever finished. When pressed on future plans, Victoria laughingly concedes: "Maybe more bulbs". With this couple's energy and vision, it's a tantalising prospect. ◻

USEFUL INFORMATION

Parsonage Farm opens for the National Garden Scheme and visits from private groups. For details, email davidandvictoria.thomas@gmail.com



A low winter sun lights up the elegant Georgian façade of Parsonage Farm, which looks out over restored fields and parkland and a reflective lake landscaped from the farm's original horse pond.

The farmhouse stands as imposing as ever, looking out over parkland and the waters of a small lake

Let's get physical

Hate the gym? Then **Dr Richard Claxton** has good news: studies show that being active in your garden offers a host of health benefits

ILLUSTRATION VICKI TURNER

Personally, I've never been one for the gym, and the pinnacle of success in sport for me at school was defined by the rare occasions when I was not picked last for any team. No, for me, sport is strictly for watching.

Nevertheless, through my medical school and junior doctor years, I realised the benefit of physical exercise to keep me in shape and relatively fit, and happily I found it in the Lycra-free environment of the garden. So if, like me, you want to use gardening to maintain your physical fitness, just how does that work, how effective is it, and how big a difference could it make?

Physical inactivity has a massive price tag for us all. With increasingly sedentary lifestyles, 38 per cent of the world's population is now defined as overweight or obese, and this is forecast to rise to 51 per cent in ten years. Subsequently, we doctors are seeing greater risks of cardiovascular diseases (CVD), cancers and Type 2 diabetes mellitus. The current cost to the NHS alone in the UK of Type 2 diabetes is a breathtaking £12 billion every year.

Move it on up

But one possible solution is close at hand: 87 per cent of the population has access to a garden or a green space of their own. Many people are waking up to this possible benefit, and seven million people in the UK started gardening during the first Covid lockdown.

A Medeconomics survey revealed that 40 per cent of us doctors enjoy gardening – that's even more than play golf. And Census data shows that 42 per cent of UK residents of all ages garden as a hobby, spending on average two hours every week working on their garden.

Gardens could offer a readily accessible solution to many of the health problems we face as individuals, and allow the focus on preventative healthcare at a societal level that has been so badly lacking in recent years.

A key study in the Netherlands in 2012 compared allotment-holders with their non-gardening neighbours. Once all other possible factors had been adjusted for, the gardeners over 60 years of age had better health outcomes in every single measure, and every aspect of their health. Likewise, a 2019 study on 150,000 gardeners across the whole USA showed they had better outcomes in terms of CVD health status, lower odds of diabetes, better mental and physical health status, greater fruit and veg intake, and altogether a significantly lower risk of ten-year mortality.

Feel the burn

Another study on people who joined a community garden in Utah showed that they were significantly less likely to be overweight. A combination of the calories burnt and healthier diets is likely to be responsible here. It's been estimated by the Center for Disease Control in the USA that an hour of gardening can burn between 250 and 350 calories. This rises in more vigorous activities, and, to my delight, illustrates that three hours in the garden can be equivalent to one in the gym.

Regular gardening can also significantly improve mobility and flexibility. Gardening tasks often require bending, reaching, and stretching, which can improve balance and co-ordination. A study published by the American Society for Horticultural Science highlighted that gardening activities can improve the range of motion and decrease the stiffness in the joints, making it an excellent exercise for people with arthritis or mobility issues.

Avoiding falls

Gardening can also help with falls prevention. The UK health think-tank, The King's Fund, reports that falls cost the NHS more than £2 billion annually, and much, much more when including the costs for social care as well. Gardening helps keep us mobile and balanced, because as we move around from task to task, we're keeping our muscles and joints active, but also working out our proprioceptive (joint position sense) nerve endings that feed into the balance centres in the brain. In 2012, the US Health and Retirement Study showed that gardeners were more likely to pass gait and balance tests, and that they had a 30 per cent reduction in falls.

A note of warning though: any discussion around the benefits of gardening and health needs to bear in mind the nearly 13 per cent of the population who have no access to their own green space. This figure is doubled in inner cities, and almost doubled again in Black, Asian or minority ethnic city-dwellers. If we're really going to embrace this movement, as a society, it needs to be embedded as a theme in all planning decisions. Whether they are for living or for work, the design of residential buildings and communities must incorporate the access that each and every one of us needs to gardens, allotments and community growing spaces.

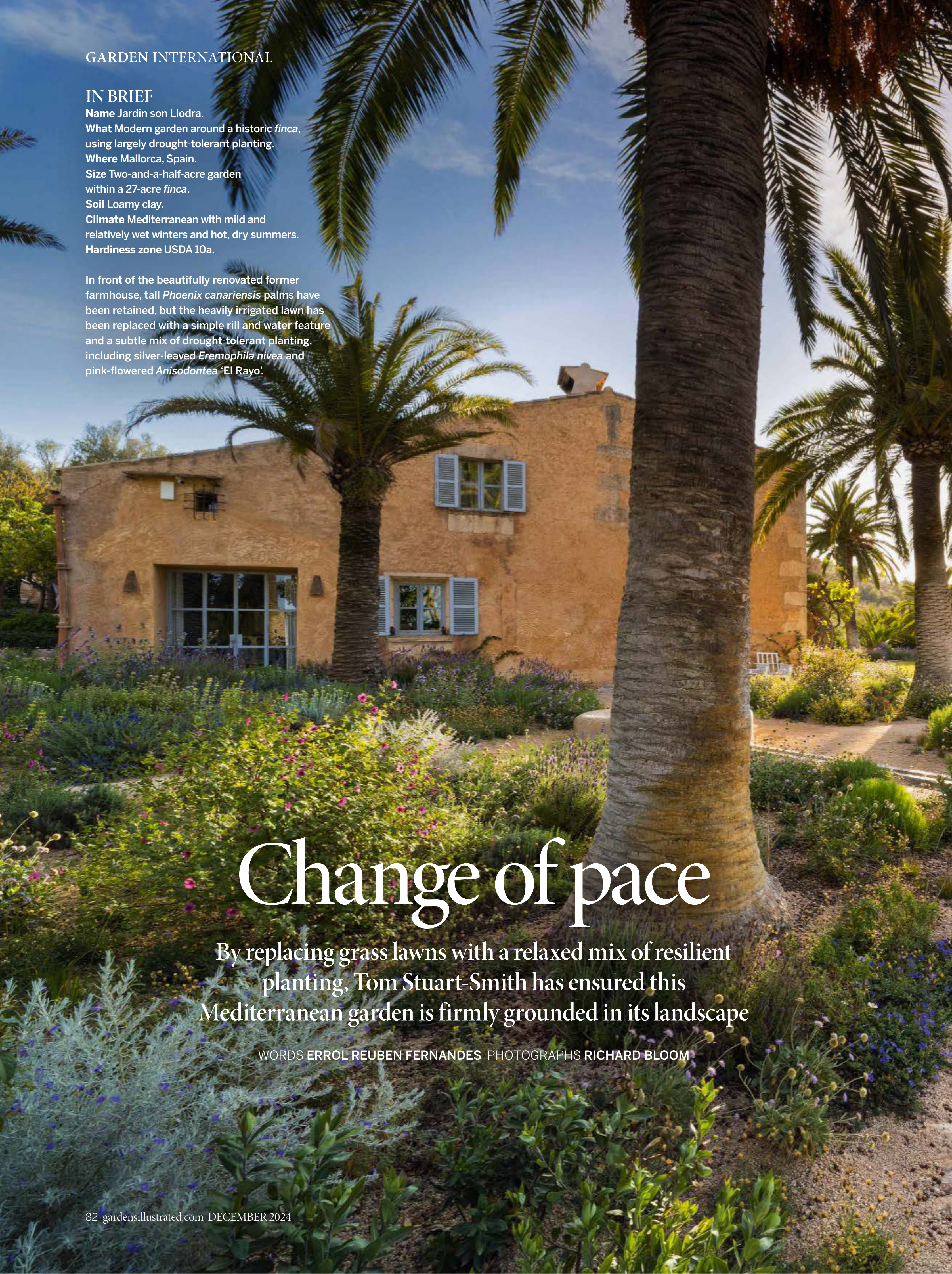
Tailored fitness

As well as its relative ubiquitousness, the other beauty of gardening as an aid to physical fitness is that it can be tailored to the individual. For those with reduced levels of fitness or mobility, adjustments can be made that enable them to keep gardening. Raised beds, lightweight tools, ergonomically designed handles, or even a smaller plot or a balcony, are all ways that we can keep on gardening, irrespective of our circumstances and abilities.

So I can happily stay in my old jeans and woolly jumpers, steer clear of the Lycra, and keep gardening both for my physical fitness, as well as all its other benefits. ◻

PORTRAIT BY LISA LINDER

Richard Claxton is a GP, garden designer and founder of green-prescribing network Gardening4Health



IN BRIEF

Name Jardin son Llodra.
What Modern garden around a historic *finca*, using largely drought-tolerant planting.
Where Mallorca, Spain.
Size Two-and-a-half-acre garden within a 27-acre *finca*.
Soil Loamy clay.
Climate Mediterranean with mild and relatively wet winters and hot, dry summers.
Hardiness zone USDA 10a.

In front of the beautifully renovated former farmhouse, tall *Phoenix canariensis* palms have been retained, but the heavily irrigated lawn has been replaced with a simple rill and water feature and a subtle mix of drought-tolerant planting, including silver-leaved *Eremophila nivea* and pink-flowered *Anisodontea* 'El Rayo'.

Change of pace

By replacing grass lawns with a relaxed mix of resilient planting, Tom Stuart-Smith has ensured this Mediterranean garden is firmly grounded in its landscape

WORDS **ERROL REUBEN FERNANDES** PHOTOGRAPHS **RICHARD BLOOM**

On the eastern side of the Balearic island of Mallorca, with hazy distant views of the Mediterranean sea, sits a rural estate of the type known in this part of the world as a *finca*. What sets this one apart is its truly enchanting garden. Designer Tom Stuart-Smith has worked closely and incrementally with his clients and team to craft this masterpiece in the most sensitive manner, to breathtaking results.

Jardin son Llodra is best explored on a warm, sunny afternoon, with a wander from the upper terrace by the house down through the main garden. There are drifts of grasses, including *Lygeum spartum*, with its tufted flowers that catch the light under the shifting shadows of mature olive and jacaranda trees; a grove of silken-leaved *Agave attenuata* and towering *Aloe arborescens*; and hummingbird hawk moths that dart about swathes of resinous-scented *Salvia leucantha*.

The garden speaks directly to the rugged Balearic landscape, but it didn't always sit so easily in its surroundings. "The garden was mainly lawn that was heavily irrigated," explains Tom, describing the site on his first visit. "There were hedges of Australasian shrubs that had been clipped within an inch of their lives. Everything was cut with shears and everything, other than the *Phoenix* palms, was maintained to look like poodles."

The fields of olive trees that surround the *finca* were often managed using damaging, modern approaches that involved annual ploughing. Tom's client wanted to move forward in a much more sustainable way and reduce their reliance on water. Together they set about clearly defining the areas of the garden. "I wanted to distinguish what was going to be garden with precious things, such as citrus and vegetables, and the area beyond would be much wilder. We established a hierarchy of land use, if you like. We retained the main entertaining terrace, and the large lawn was dramatically reduced."

The main garden further down is a little over an acre but borrows a lot from the landscape beyond, which features species commonly found in the Mallorcan landscape, such as lentisk trees (*Pistacia lentiscus*), Mediterranean heather (*Erica multiflora*) and rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*). These plants, together with the beautifully crafted, traditional stone walling that is synonymous with the island, help blur the lines of where the garden starts and the landscape beyond continues.

Many interesting species from Mediterranean climate zones around the world have also been skilfully incorporated into the design. *Eremophila nivea*, endemic to Western Australia, provides a gleaming silver contrast, punctuating the planting at irregular intervals. *Lomelosia cretica* (native to the Balearic Islands and Italy), also works hard in the garden, drifted through *Lavandula dentata*, *Phlomis lychnitis* and *Euphorbia rigida* – its delicate, scabious-like blooms providing a long season of interest, which concludes with translucent, spherical seedheads that glow when illuminated by the sunlight, and quiver in the slightest breeze.

This area of the garden was planted in 100-120mm of grit. Gardens planted in this way, with the right species, require very little water, and, Tom confirms, very little to do in the way of weed management. One drawback to this is that there can be little in the way of self-seeding, which means there is less sense of the dynamic change that occurs when plants place themselves.

Nick Pusterla, a director from Tom's studio, works with him on their projects in the Mediterranean and, three years on from ▷

This image The yellow heads and silver foliage of *Helichrysum italicum* add highlights among cool blues and greens of the likes of *Salvia leucantha and Lavandula dentata*.

Right A subtle mix of colours from the delicate white flowers of *Tulbaghia violacea* 'Alba' and blue bobble heads of *Lomelosia cretica* to bright-pink *Euphorbia rigida* and yellow *Phlomis lanata* around a cooling fountain made by a local artisan.

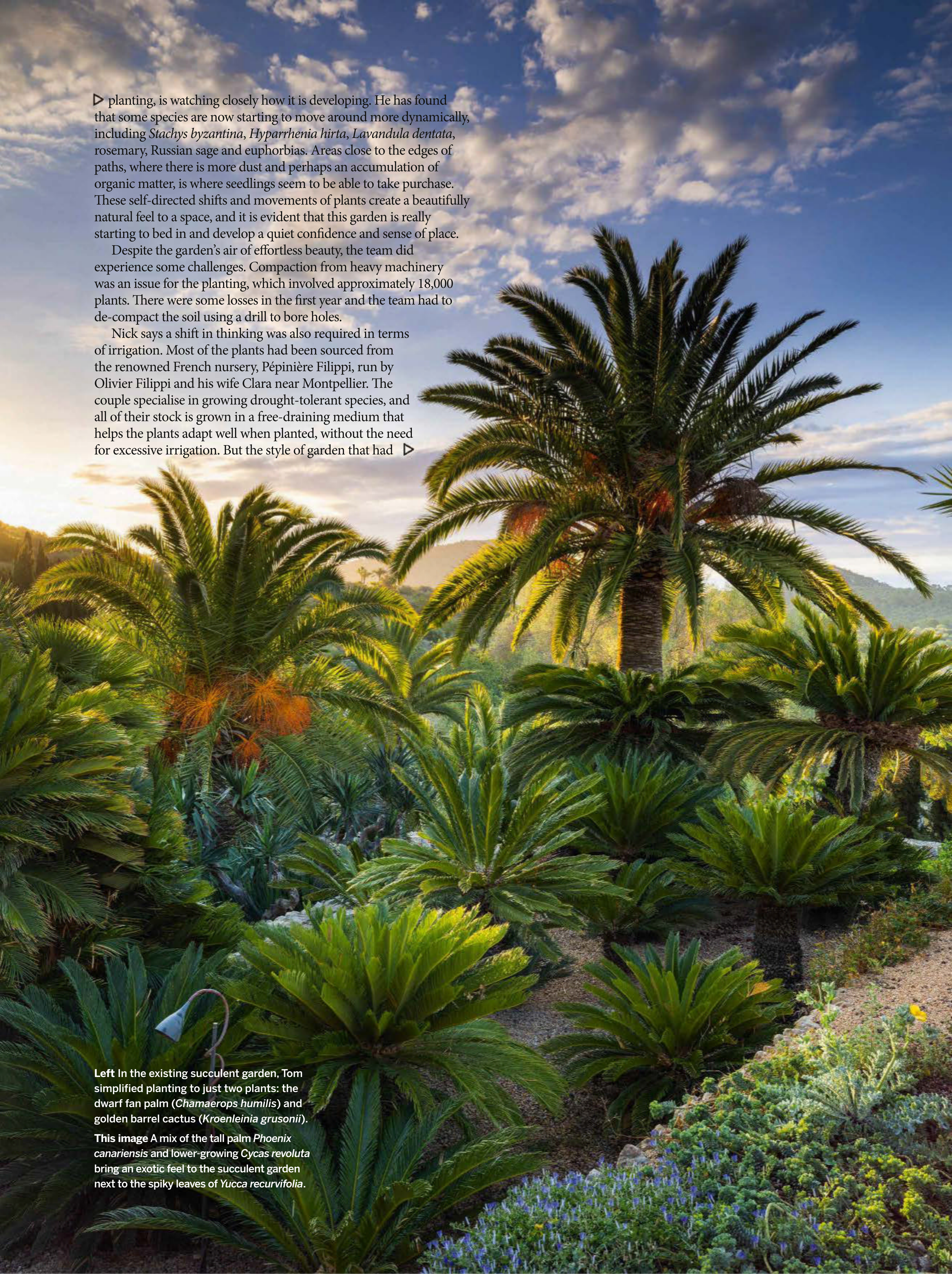
The garden speaks directly to the rugged Balearic landscape, but it didn't always sit so easily in its surroundings

Tom's client wanted to move forward in a much more sustainable way and reduce their reliance on water

▷ planting, is watching closely how it is developing. He has found that some species are now starting to move around more dynamically, including *Stachys byzantina*, *Hyparrhenia hirta*, *Lavandula dentata*, rosemary, Russian sage and euphorbias. Areas close to the edges of paths, where there is more dust and perhaps an accumulation of organic matter, is where seedlings seem to be able to take purchase. These self-directed shifts and movements of plants create a beautifully natural feel to a space, and it is evident that this garden is really starting to bed in and develop a quiet confidence and sense of place.

Despite the garden's air of effortless beauty, the team did experience some challenges. Compaction from heavy machinery was an issue for the planting, which involved approximately 18,000 plants. There were some losses in the first year and the team had to de-compact the soil using a drill to bore holes.

Nick says a shift in thinking was also required in terms of irrigation. Most of the plants had been sourced from the renowned French nursery, Pépinière Filippi, run by Olivier Filippi and his wife Clara near Montpellier. The couple specialise in growing drought-tolerant species, and all of their stock is grown in a free-draining medium that helps the plants adapt well when planted, without the need for excessive irrigation. But the style of garden that had ▷



Left In the existing succulent garden, Tom simplified planting to just two plants: the dwarf fan palm (*Chamaerops humilis*) and golden barrel cactus (*Kroenleinia grusonii*).

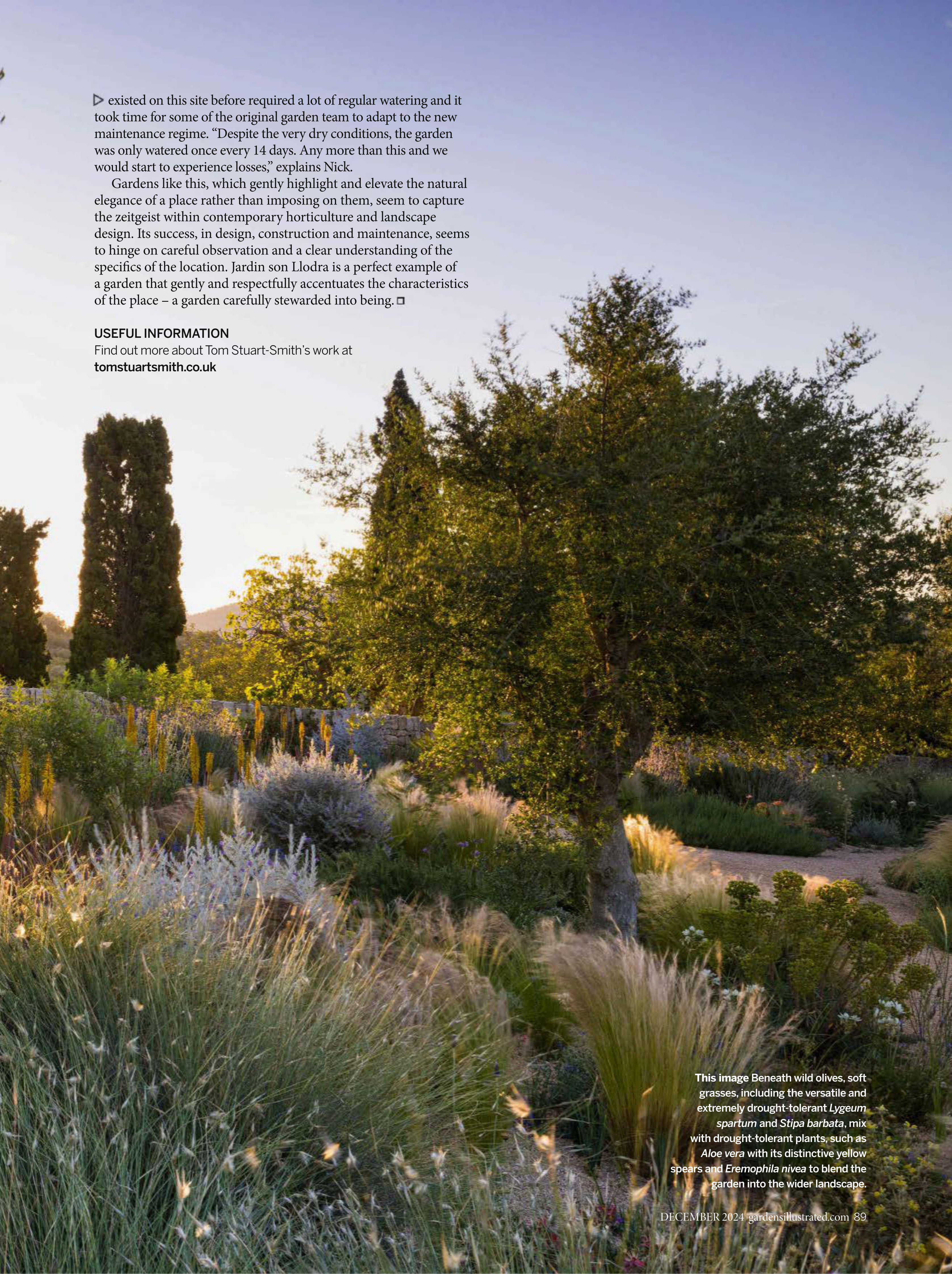
This image A mix of the tall palm *Phoenix canariensis* and lower-growing *Cycas revoluta* bring an exotic feel to the succulent garden next to the spiky leaves of *Yucca recurvifolia*.

Drifts of grasses include *Lygeum spartum* with its tufted flowers that catch the light under the shifting shadows of mature olive and jacaranda trees

▷ existed on this site before required a lot of regular watering and it took time for some of the original garden team to adapt to the new maintenance regime. “Despite the very dry conditions, the garden was only watered once every 14 days. Any more than this and we would start to experience losses,” explains Nick.

Gardens like this, which gently highlight and elevate the natural elegance of a place rather than imposing on them, seem to capture the zeitgeist within contemporary horticulture and landscape design. Its success, in design, construction and maintenance, seems to hinge on careful observation and a clear understanding of the specifics of the location. Jardin son Llodra is a perfect example of a garden that gently and respectfully accentuates the characteristics of the place – a garden carefully stewarded into being. ◻

USEFUL INFORMATION
Find out more about Tom Stuart-Smith’s work at **tomstuartsmith.co.uk**



This image Beneath wild olives, soft grasses, including the versatile and extremely drought-tolerant *Lygeum spartum* and *Stipa barbata*, mix with drought-tolerant plants, such as *Aloe vera* with its distinctive yellow spears and *Eremophila nivea* to blend the garden into the wider landscape.

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Design

News, garden design solutions and sourcebook

Taste of the wild

Over the past 20 years, Knepp's 3,500-acre rewilding project has helped create thriving ecosystems and space for endangered species, Exmoor ponies and English longhorn cattle. Its most recent project extends this landscape into the courtyard that surrounds the estate's café and farm shop.

Knepp Walled Garden's head gardener Charlie Harpur has used native and garden plants in the courtyard to recreate and channel the surrounding wood pastures. Plants that pop up of their own accord, such as ox-eye daisies (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), are curated in the adjacent grassland for their value for wildlife. Drought-tolerant herbs make up the 'horticultural scrub' style planting beneath field maple trees and locally sourced dead oak branches provide both structure and wildlife habitats.

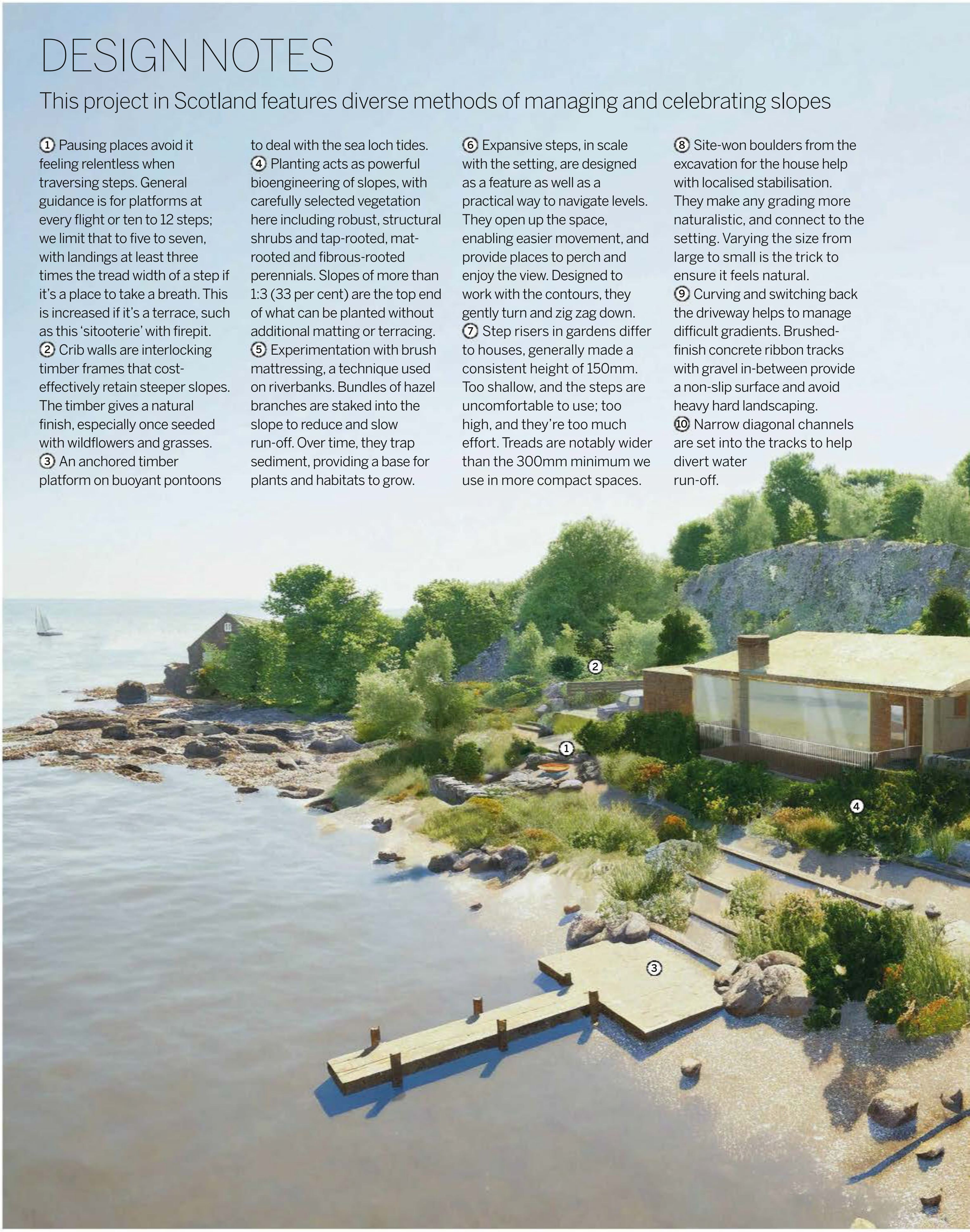
The winding paths between the shop, café and central stone water trough are made from reclaimed bricks and evoke wild animal 'desire lines'. Any leftover building waste has been piled into wire gabion walls, providing shelter for insects. To encourage birds and bats back to the site, the garden team has added swallow, swift and bat boxes around the buildings, and even stork nest platforms on nearby telegraph poles. **knepp.co.uk**

WORDS: ALICE TUFFERY. PHOTOGRAPHS: CHARLIE HARPUR

DESIGN NOTES

This project in Scotland features diverse methods of managing and celebrating slopes

① Pausing places avoid it feeling relentless when traversing steps. General guidance is for platforms at every flight or ten to 12 steps; we limit that to five to seven, with landings at least three times the tread width of a step if it's a place to take a breath. This is increased if it's a terrace, such as this 'sitooterie' with firepit.
② Crib walls are interlocking timber frames that cost-effectively retain steeper slopes. The timber gives a natural finish, especially once seeded with wildflowers and grasses.
③ An anchored timber platform on buoyant pontoons to deal with the sea loch tides.
④ Planting acts as powerful bioengineering of slopes, with carefully selected vegetation here including robust, structural shrubs and tap-rooted, mat-rooted and fibrous-rooted perennials. Slopes of more than 1:3 (33 per cent) are the top end of what can be planted without additional matting or terracing.
⑤ Experimentation with brush mattressing, a technique used on riverbanks. Bundles of hazel branches are staked into the slope to reduce and slow run-off. Over time, they trap sediment, providing a base for plants and habitats to grow.
⑥ Expansive steps, in scale with the setting, are designed as a feature as well as a practical way to navigate levels. They open up the space, enabling easier movement, and provide places to perch and enjoy the view. Designed to work with the contours, they gently turn and zig zag down.
⑦ Step risers in gardens differ to houses, generally made a consistent height of 150mm. Too shallow, and the steps are uncomfortable to use; too high, and they're too much effort. Treads are notably wider than the 300mm minimum we use in more compact spaces.
⑧ Site-won boulders from the excavation for the house help with localised stabilisation. They make any grading more naturalistic, and connect to the setting. Varying the size from large to small is the trick to ensure it feels natural.
⑨ Curving and switching back the driveway helps to manage difficult gradients. Brushed-finish concrete ribbon tracks with gravel in-between provide a non-slip surface and avoid heavy hard landscaping.
⑩ Narrow diagonal channels are set into the tracks to help divert water run-off.



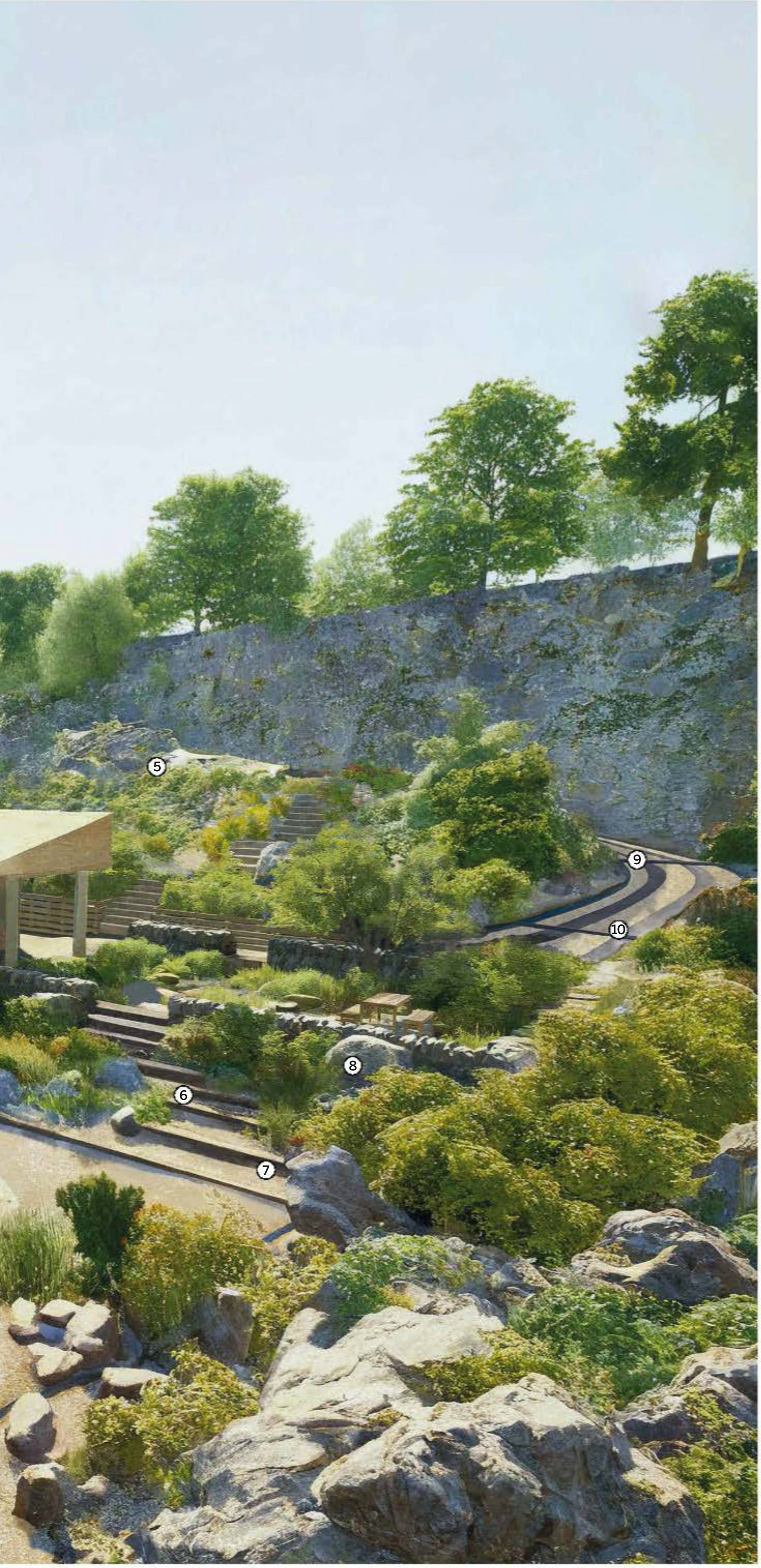


ILLUSTRATION HARRIS BUGG STUDIO. PORTRAIT CHRISTA HOLKA

SLOPES AND LEVELS

Creating a garden on a sloping site brings a host of challenges, but, says designer **Charlotte Harris**, with careful planning it is also an opportunity to make a really interesting space

Natural changes in elevation can help break up a space. They enhance movement and offer up new perspectives and vistas. Gradients also offer exciting opportunities for thinking about planting differently. This is why, despite some potentially daunting slopes, a new garden site that we're working on in northwest Scotland excited us from our first visit. Leaving aside the breathtaking views across a sea loch and the rugged terrain, this sloping garden has dynamic potential.

In this case, we wanted to design a beautiful garden that could be sensitively woven into the landscape, while also minimising any heavily interventionist construction. A thorough topographic survey, with contours and levels at regular intervals, was critical. This detailed mapping provided a precise understanding of the levels – an understanding that became even more nuanced through repeated on-site explorations of the site's characteristics and features. Taking that time to consider, ideally on different days and at different times of the year, is invaluable.

A survey also allows for the calculation of volumes that might be required to fill areas for flattening or levelling out. That volume can then be matched up with areas of the garden that would benefit from a reduction in levels. Balancing the 'cut and fill' will ideally remove, but certainly reduce, the carbon-heavy and expensive options of removing waste material or bringing in new. It's also essential to store the soil correctly on site to ensure it remains healthy.

For this Scottish project, we tried to avoid chunky retaining walls, designing them in as several smaller ones that are gently staggered, rather than a couple of huge whoppers. They're made using the traditional craft of mortar-free, dry-stone walling, which allows water to pass through the crevices and gaps in the stonework, without the need for formal

▷

Charlotte Harris is an award-winning garden designer, co-founder of Harris Bugg Studio with Hugo Bugg, and a *Gardens Illustrated* contributing editor.

DESIGN IDEAS

① **Crib walls** In this garden on the Isle of Wight, Andy Sturgeon has used cost-effective timber crib walls to retain some of the steep slopes. Interlocking timber frames are filled with stone or aggregate for sturdiness, and this also allows water to filter through. Another low-cost alternative, which we're using to retain a slope at Horatio's Garden Sheffield & East, is vegetation bags made of biodegradable geotextile, filled with growing media, stacked and seeded to allow plants to root through.

② **Planting** Despite a tough climate with 40°C summers, strong winds, little water and poor soil, Fernando Martos made this garden near Madrid, which cleverly softens the slope with structural yet organic pillowy hedges, through which the perennials and grasses are woven.

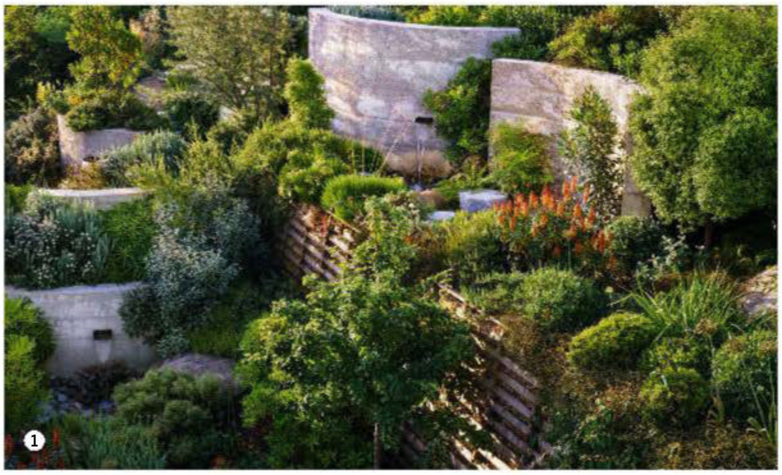
③ **Ha-ha** An 18th-century device to allow uninterrupted vistas while maintaining the practical functions of the landscape (originally livestock), a ha-ha can be a helpful device to screen. Here in Dorset, we have dropped the tennis court out of sight. It's also an approach we're using on the Isle of Skye on a project to part-disguise a driveway as it leads up to the house.

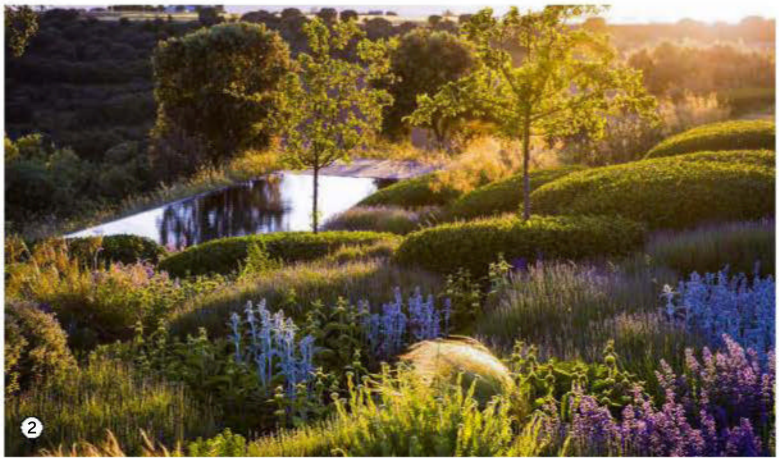
④ **Look outs** One of the most memorable modernist garden experiences I've had is of a simple platform set into the side of the sub-tropical gardens surrounding architect Lina Bo Bardi's house, just outside São Paulo. Here in Massachusetts, landscape designer Matthew Cunningham similarly celebrates the vantage point of the slope – the pop of the blue furniture is an extra joy.

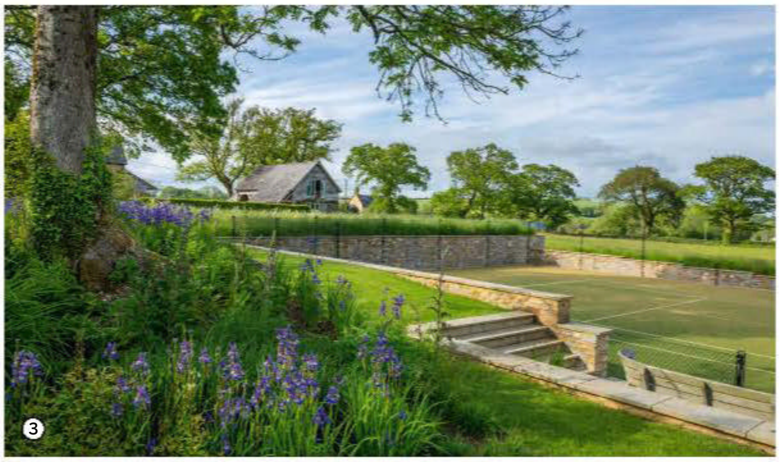
⑤ **Slides** I'll never forget the joyousness of whizzing through the Tate Modern on Carsten Höller's slides back in 2006. This garden in London, designed and built by Garden Club London, handles levels with a wonderful sense of playfulness, introducing a slide for the children (and I'm quite sure the adults) of the family.

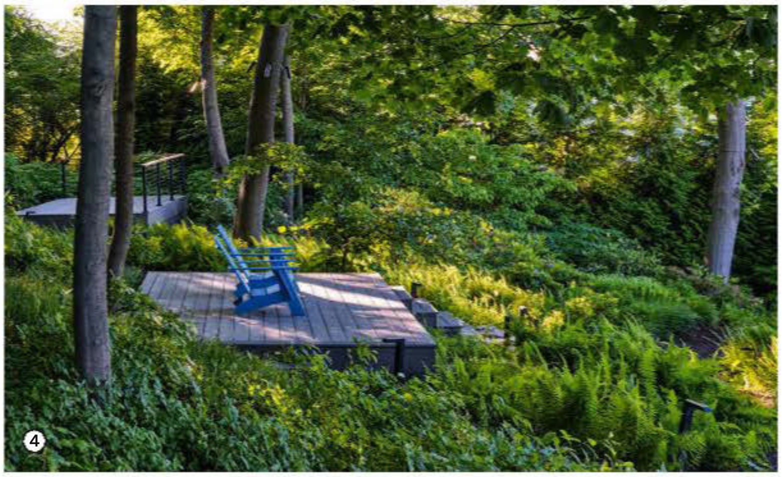
⑥ **Steps in lawn** In this Wiltshire garden, Sheila Jack has embraced the gentle incline and responded by introducing these natural stone edges into the sloped lawn. Elsewhere, a sinuous path of cobbles ramps gently through, handling the level changes and undulations while at the same time avoiding steps.

⑦ **City garden steps** Steps gently interface into retaining walls here in the designer Emily Erlam's own London garden, where she has crafted beautiful opportunities from a narrow city plot. Four terraced levels were created from building spoil, each of which has its own feel and degree of intimacy, enhanced by the planting and the selection of materials.

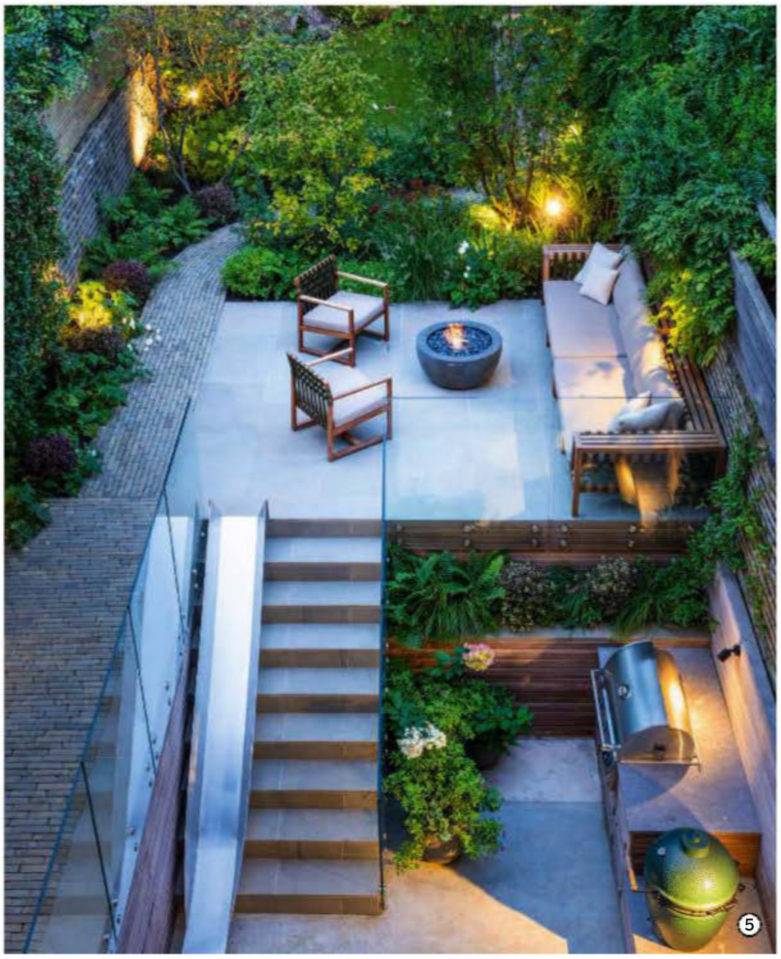








1 RACHEL WARNE, 2 CLAIRE TAKACS, 3 MARIANNE MAJERUS, 4 MATTHEW CUNNINGHAM



5 JOANNA KOSSAK / GARDEN CLUB LONDON. 6 MATTHEW CUNNINGHAM. 7 ÉVA NÉMETH

The paths zig-zag and meander, working with the contours of the land, to make ascents and descents smoother and less tiring

▷ weepholes, which most retaining structures will need. Land drains have also been added behind the base of the walls to ensure a belt-and-braces approach in preventing a build-up of hydrostatic pressure.

The paths zig-zag and meander, working with the contours of the land, to make ascents and descents smoother and less tiring. When choosing materials for sloping paths, consider those that offer good traction, durability and permeability. On this project, where the slopes were gentle, along contours, we decided to use angular gravel sourced from a nearby quarry. It locks into place better than round gravel, and this angular look is also reflected in the surrounding geology. A compacted sub-base beneath the gravel provides a firmer base, reducing movement, and timber or metal edging also helps stop it moving downhill.

Steps and ramps

In steeper sections, steps and terraced landings are needed to make the garden easier to navigate. In our Scottish example, the steps in the lower loch-side garden are simple strips of reclaimed granite lintels, chosen for durability and landscape relevance, with a uniform riser height to ensure that people's natural walking rhythms are not disrupted. A similar effect could be achieved with railway sleepers on edge, or timber planks – just ensure they are properly treated to withstand outdoor conditions.

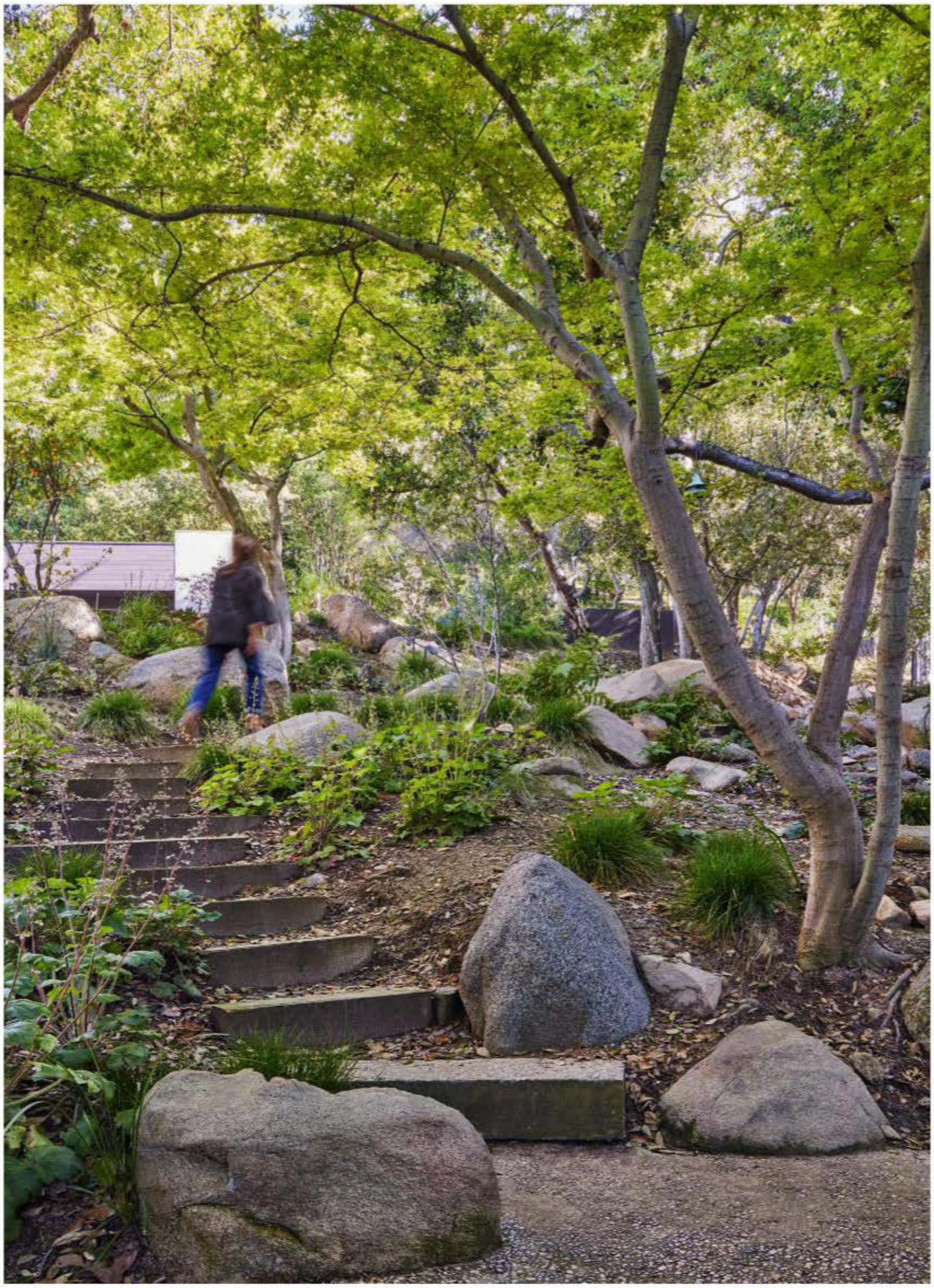
Steps should be designed in scale with a garden. Here, they're wide to suit the expansiveness of the setting; they open the space up and enable easier movement. Narrow steps might feel pinched here, but in a more intimate space like a courtyard or small garden, they would feel entirely suitable. A hard landing at the base of a step run – gravel or natural stone – is a small but significant detail to prevent wear.

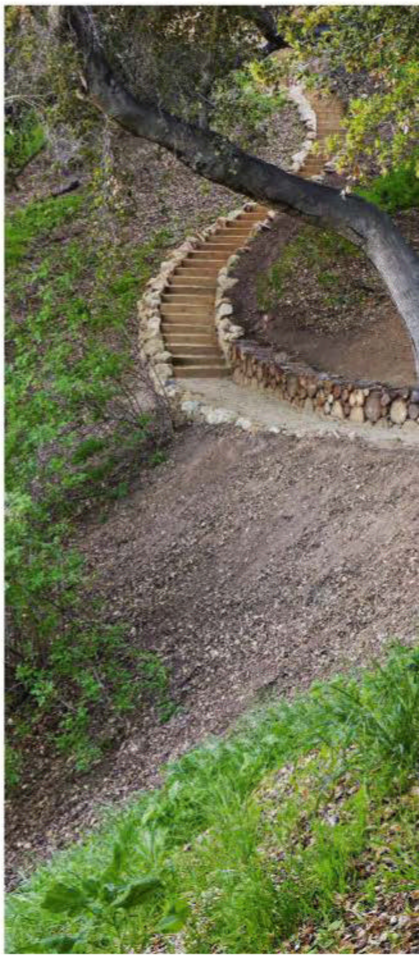
One alternative to steps is to use a ramp (no steeper than 1:12 for independent use and 1:10 for assisted use), which can be helpful for future gardening. Planning now how you'll move barrows and bulky items about will leave your future self less sweaty and grateful for your foresight.

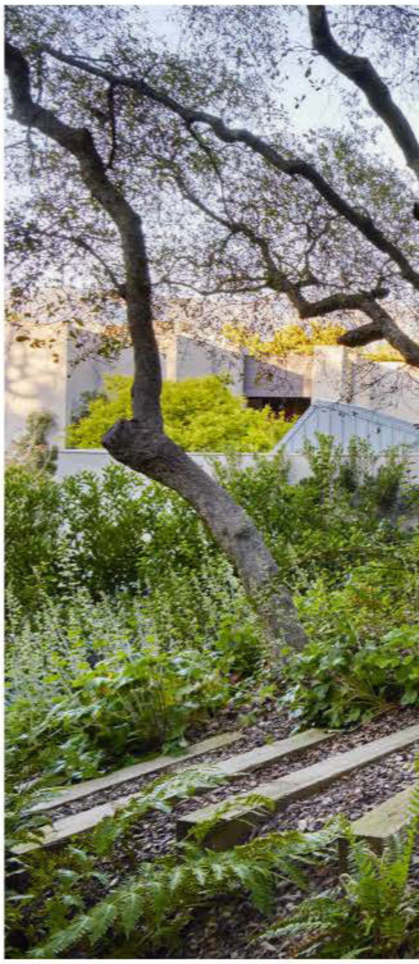
Managing drainage is particularly crucial in a sloping garden, and it's worth taking specialist advice early on to plan it. In the Scottish project, land drains, planted swales and the narrow diagonal channels that are set into the ribbon tracks were designed to handle water together as it moves downhill.

Planting for slopes

Planting helps to stabilise a slope and manage water movement. Choosing species suited to the demands of slopes and to your specific setting (including ▷







CASE STUDY

How Californian design studio Terremoto uses simple, natural design materials to tackle slopes

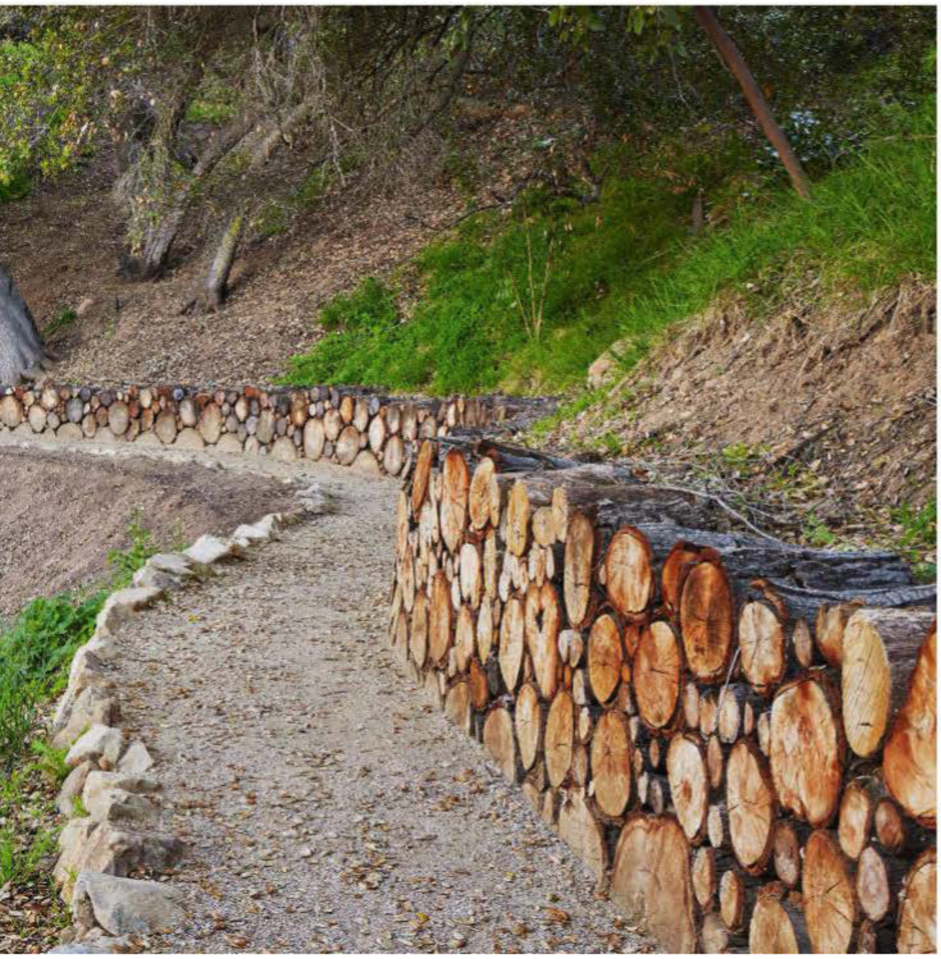
Well known for its regenerative, creative-design approach that prioritises stewardship and social responsibility, Terremoto produces work of radical re-imagination.

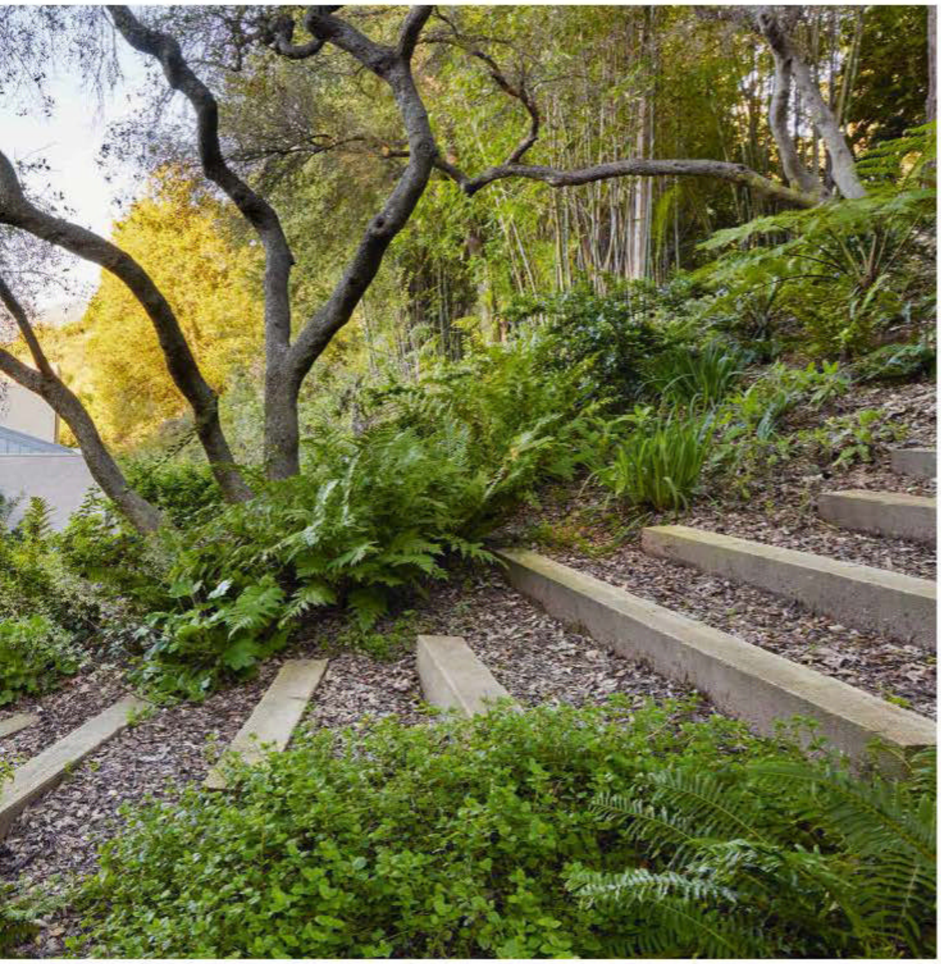
After talking to David Godshall from Terremoto about its design for two sloping gardens, I came away feeling so invigorated. "A wall with concrete should be the last solution, not the first," says David, "and only used when all other options are exhausted. Let the land be. Slopes are exciting, and kids love to play on hills."

Responding to, rather than imposing on, the site comes from knowing it, walking it and revering it. In one garden, a simple series of trails avoids all tree roots.

Elegant, timber-fronted steps curve down through the landscape and carefully past the trees. This makes it enjoyable to explore, while at the same time is still mindful of rich, living underground networks.

In the other garden, dead trees from the site have been used to create retaining walls as well as a wonderful new habitat.





CAITLIN ATKINSON

Slopes require us to rethink our planting design, as they alter perspectives – taller species at the back and shorter at the front won't work here

exposure to prevailing winds) can deliver a beautiful, ecological and a practical 'bioengineering' function.

Slopes also require us to rethink our planting design, as they alter perspectives – taller species at the back and shorter at the front won't work here. There are different ways of experiencing the planting: from the side as you move up and down steps; from the top looking down; and from the bottom looking up. Also, the soil on a slope will hold more moisture at the bottom and be dryer at the top, so be sure to double check your right plant is in the right place.

Tap-rooted perennials, such as *Centranthus ruber*, *Mertensia maritima* or *Eryngium maritimum*, help to anchor the soil, as do the spreading root networks of ivies and ferns. Ornamental grasses, such as *Deschampsia cespitosa*, *Anemanthele lessoniana* and cultivars of *Panicum virgatum* – showstoppers for slopes that have texture and movement – also have fibrous roots that help knit the soil. Pioneer plants including willow, broom, rowan, alder and gorse are also well adapted to trickier situations such as this.

Using mulches on a slope helps retain moisture and reduce erosion. Heavier materials applied in a thin layer – site-won shredded prunings, larger bark or gravel – are less likely to be washed away.

Gardens on slopes are also wonderful opportunities to look to similar landscape typologies for inspiration – alpines, scree, rockery and crevice gardens are all up for grabs.

Slopes move water and nutrients away. In my own sloping garden, I've added small linear pockets just above some of the tree whips we've planted on a steep slope, to encourage moisture to slow on its downward journey; a home-made version of techniques used in traditional agriculture. The idea of 'micro-reservoirs' might be coming on a bit strong here, but hopefully you get my drift.

Watch the drop

Lastly, when we are talking about slopes, I have to put my proverbial health-and-safety hi-vis vest on. Currently in the UK, level drops of more than 600mm require edge protection – usually a balustrade of 1.1m. You should always check current building regulations to make sure you're on top of them. Even when drops are shallower than 600mm, consider how you can deter people going too close to the edge by designing in planting beds, or softening any small drop to the side. On the Scottish project, we will be using shrubs such as bog myrtle, broom and coppiced willow. ◻

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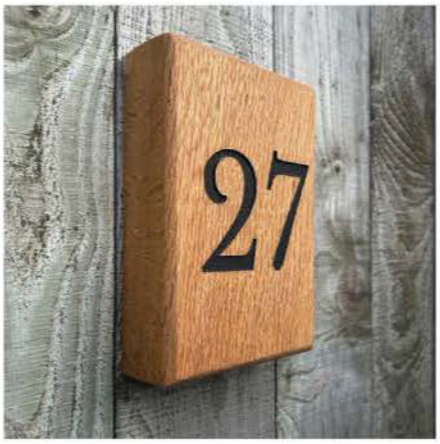
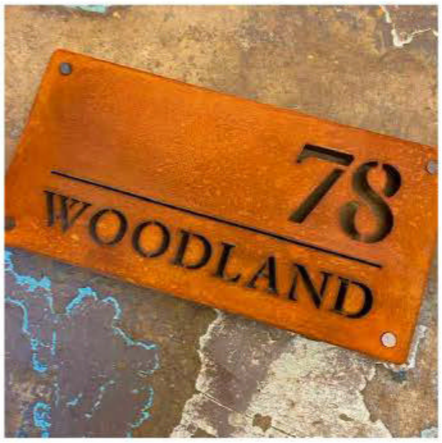
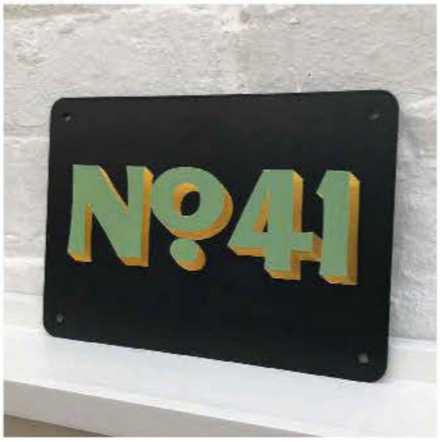


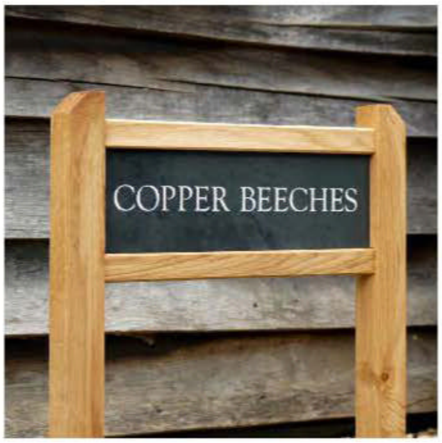
AGAINST THE GRAIN
Engraved Wooden Number Plaque,
from £39, Grain Designs,
07812 572579, graindesigns.co.uk



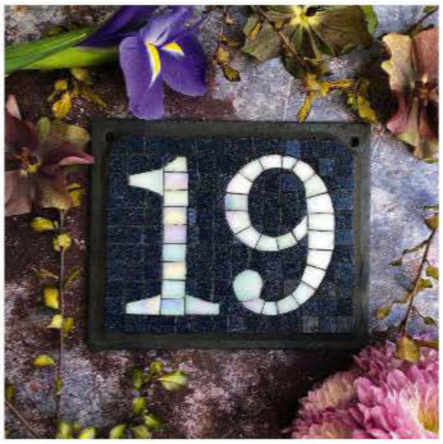
STEELY SIGNS
Corten Steel House Number Signs,
from £90, Cam Graphic,
notonthehighstreet.com



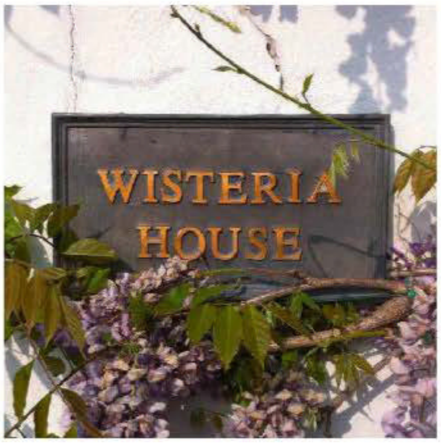
HAND PAINTED
Hand Painted House Number Flourish Style,
from £75, Holly & Co,
holly.co



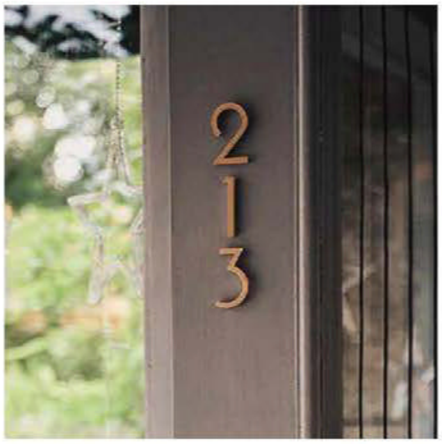
STAND OUT
Engraved Slate Sign With Oak Posts,
from £319, Traditional Wooden Gifts,
traditionalwoodengifts.co.uk



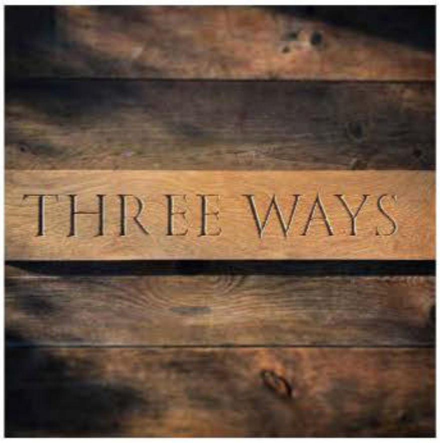
IN PIECES
Mosaic House Numbers,
from £35, Fat Poppy Cat,
fatpoppycat.co.uk



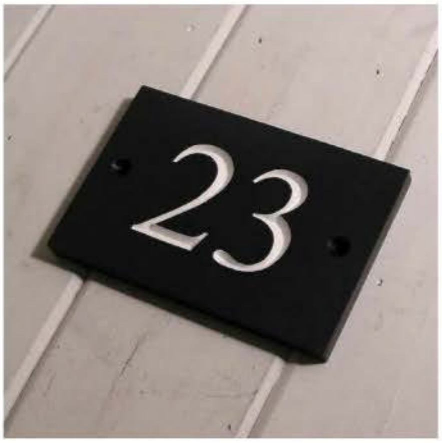
HEAVY DUTY
Rectangular Lead House Sign,
from £139.99, Redfields English Leadwork,
023 9287 0000, redfields.co.uk



BRASS STYLE
DEKO Solid Brass House Numbers, 8cm,
£24 per numeral, Meraki,
shopmeraki.co



CARVE MY NAME
Carved House Sign,
from £50, Carved By Tom,
07814 012448, carvedbytom.co.uk



ECO STYLE
Eco House Numbers,
£24.95, The Worm That Turned,
0345 605 2505, worm.co.uk

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If you become a Bondholder with the Holiday Property Bond, you can take your pick from hundreds of stunning properties set in beautiful grounds and award-winning gardens.

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El Balcón de Santa Ana, La Gomera

You could win £2,500 when you find out more Enquire by **23rd December 2024** and you will be entered into our prize draw to win one of six individual cash prizes totalling £3,000.

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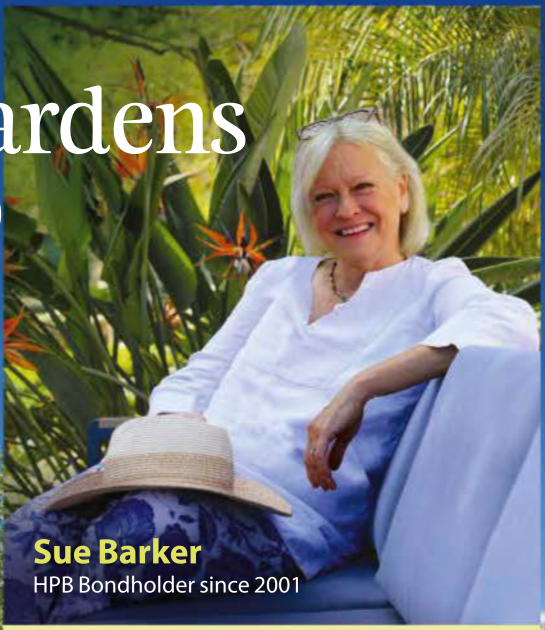

Sue Barker
HPB Bondholder since 2001

Discover a new way to holiday

By becoming a Bondholder, you'll discover a refreshing new approach to the way you plan and enjoy your breaks. In fact, that's what more than 40,000 holidaymakers have already done.

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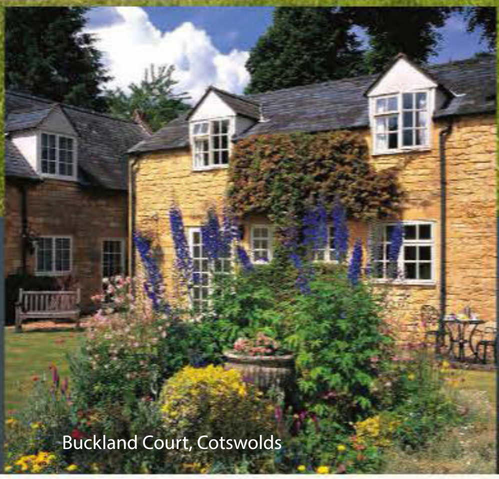

Buckland Court, Cotswolds

Le Manoir du Hilguy, Brittany

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This was Sylvia's promise to you...

A generation ago, a woman named Sylvia made a promise. As a doctor's secretary, she'd watched stroke destroy the lives of so many people. She was determined to make sure we could all live in a world where we're far less likely to lose our lives to stroke.

She kept her promise, and a gift to the Stroke Association was included in her Will. Sylvia's gift helped fund the work that made sure many more of us survive stroke now than did in her lifetime.

Sylvia changed the story for us all. Now it's our turn to change the story for those who'll come after us.

Stroke still shatters lives and tears families apart. And for so many survivors the road to recovery is still long and desperately lonely. If you or someone you love has been affected by stroke – you'll know just what that means.

But it doesn't have to be like this. You can change the story, just like Sylvia did, with a gift in your Will. All it takes is a promise.

You can promise future generations a world where researchers discover new treatments and surgeries and every single stroke survivor has the best care, rehabilitation and support network possible, to help them rebuild their lives.

Will you make that promise to generations to come? Please, leave a gift in your Will to the Stroke Association.

Find out how by calling 020 7566 1505
or email legacy@stroke.org.uk
or visit stroke.org.uk/legacy

Rebuilding lives after stroke

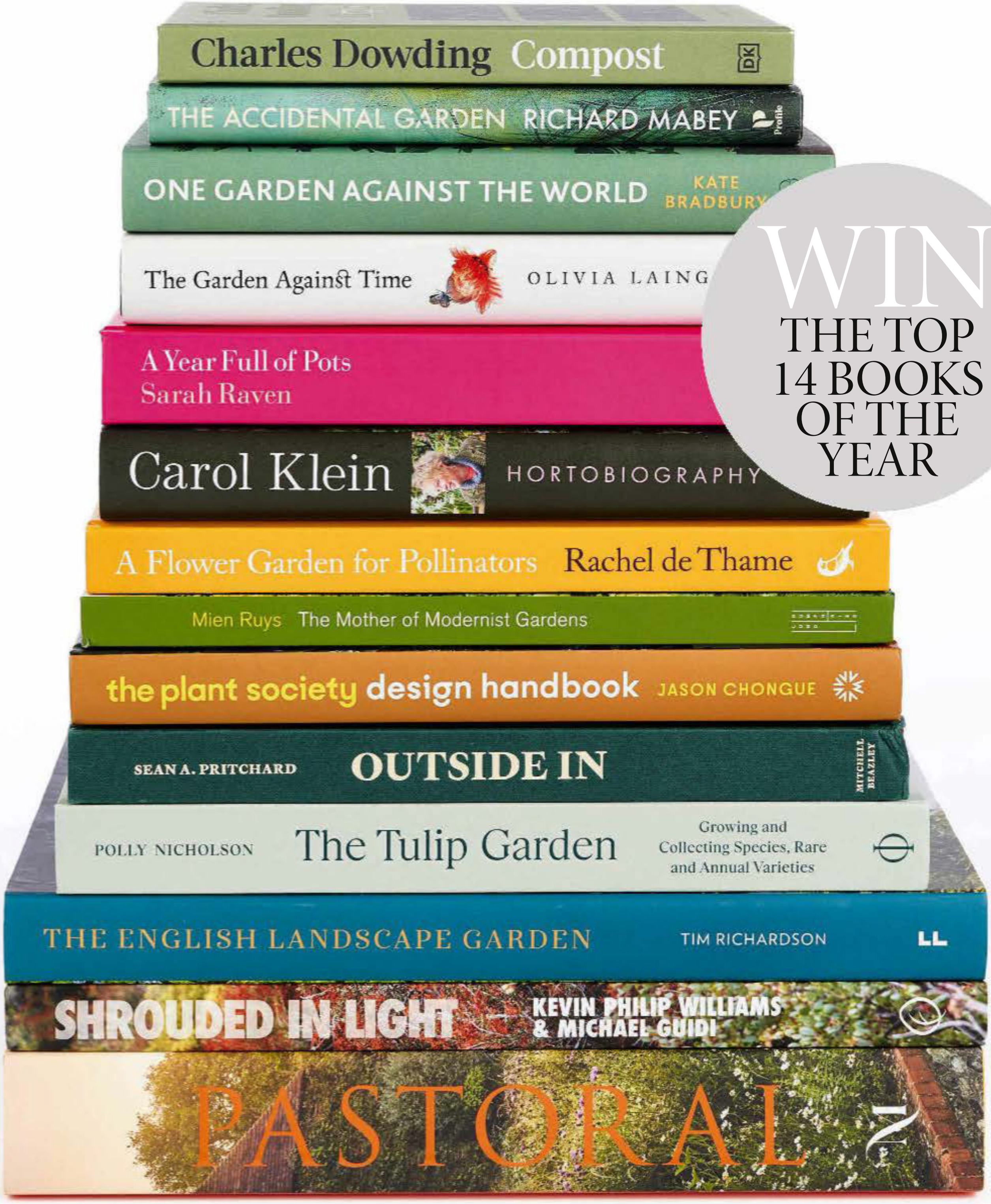
The Stroke Association is registered as a charity in England and Wales (No 211015) and in Scotland (SC037789).
Also registered in the Isle of Man (No. 945) and Jersey (NPO 369), and operating as a charity in Northern Ireland.

Stroke Association

GARDENS ILLUSTRATED'S

Gardening books *of the year 2024*

Whether you're looking for a last-minute Christmas gift, or a great read in which to lose yourself in the dark winter months, find the perfect book among our top picks


Charles Dowding Compost DK
THE ACCIDENTAL GARDEN RICHARD MABEY Profile
ONE GARDEN AGAINST THE WORLD KATE BRADBURY
The Garden Against Time OLIVIA LAING
A Year Full of Pots Sarah Raven
Carol Klein HORTOBIOGRAPHY
A Flower Garden for Pollinators Rachel de Thame
Mien Ruys The Mother of Modernist Gardens
the plant society design handbook JASON CHONGUE
SEAN A. PRITCHARD OUTSIDE IN MITCHELL BEAZLEY
POLLY NICHOLSON The Tulip Garden Growing and Collecting Species, Rare and Annual Varieties
THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE GARDEN TIM RICHARDSON LL
SHROUDED IN LIGHT KEVIN PHILIP WILLIAMS & MICHAEL GUIDI
PASTORAL

WIN
THE TOP
14 BOOKS
OF THE
YEAR

DAVE CAUDERY

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Rachel de Thame
A Flower Garden for Pollinators
KATE BRADBURY
ONE GARDEN AGAINST THE WORLD
IN SEARCH OF HOPE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE
A Year Full of Pots
Sarah Raven

A FLOWER GARDEN FOR POLLINATORS
by Rachel de Thame
Greenfinch, £25
ISBN 978-1529422146

Horticulturist and *Gardeners' World* presenter Rachel de Thame suggests plants we can grow that are rich in nectar and pollen in every season, but also highlights the importance of including plants that provide shelter and places to lay eggs. "By adopting a holistic, year-round approach, one can really make a difference," she says. "I believe having a beautiful garden can go hand in hand with creating a space that delivers equally for the pollinators and other beneficial insects so vital to a healthy and vibrant ecosystem." **VP**

ONE GARDEN AGAINST THE WORLD: IN SEARCH OF HOPE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE
by Kate Bradbury
Bloomsbury Wildlife, £18.99
ISBN 978-1399408868

One Garden Against the World is part nature love story, part call to arms. It won't fix climate change or the threat of biodiversity collapse on its own, but it will help us gardeners focus on the things we can do in our own backyards and allotments to give life forms the best chance of survival, and us a real sense of purpose in what we can do to help. The overriding take from this book is that the custodians of the UK's 30 million gardens can make a difference. **CW**

A YEAR FULL OF POTS: CONTAINER FLOWERS FOR ALL SEASONS
by Sarah Raven
Bloomsbury Publishing, £27
ISBN 978-1526667472

Following on from her two previous books in this seasonal series – *A Year Full of Flowers* and *A Year Full of Veg* – Sarah Raven shows how to grow flowers all year round in pots. It's packed full of practical and clever ideas on creating beautiful pots throughout the year, including how to combine flower colours using a 'bride' flower (the star of the show), a 'bridesmaid' (smaller and less conspicuous) and a 'gatecrasher' (the colour contrast that brings the whole thing to life). **VP**

PASTORAL GARDENS
by Clare Foster and
Andrew Montgomery
Montgomery Press, £55
ISBN 978-1399992565

Regular photographer for *Gardens Illustrated* Andrew Montgomery and garden editor Clare Foster explore the idea of the pastoral garden and what it means today. Featuring 20 notable gardens, including Knepp Walled Garden, The Barbican Gardens and Sarah Price's own garden near Abergavenny in Wales, it looks at the themes of informality, sanctuary, landscape and habitat, and includes essays from Jinny Blom, Nigel Dunnett, Kim Wilkie and Tom Stuart-Smith. **VP**

HORTOBIOGRAPHY: A GRITTY WOMAN'S TALE OF PEOPLE, PLACES AND PLANTS
by Carol Klein
Witness Books, £22
ISBN 978-1529144246

A memoir about the horticulturist's life 'from the word go, up to the present day and a bit into the future'. Via her childhood in Manchester, training as an artist and a teacher, her first experiments in plantswomanship at Glebe Cottage, finding an unexpected career as a television presenter, and her recent experience of cancer, Carol tells the story of the people, places and plants that have shaped her life. **VP**

PASTORAL GARDENS
Carol Klein
HORTOBIOGRAPHY
A gritty woman's tale of people, places and plants
the plant society design handbook

Mien Ruys
The Mother of Modernist Gardens
JULIA CRAWFORD
The Tulip Garden
PHAIDON
POLLY NICHOLSON
'Absolutely enchanting' ISABELLA TREE
RICHARD MABEY
THE ACCIDENTAL GARDEN
GARDENS, WILDERNESS AND THE SPACE IN BETWEEN

MIEN RUYS: THE MOTHER OF MODERNIST GARDENS
by Julia Crawford
Lund Humphries, £39.95
ISBN 978-1848225640

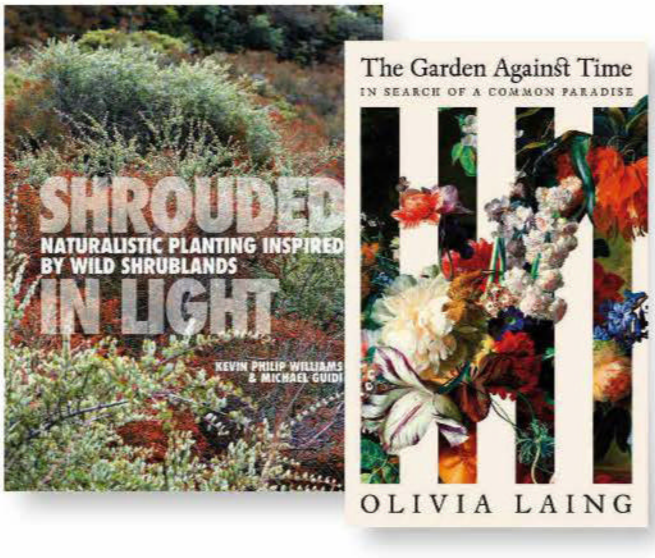
This book – the first comprehensive study in English about the life and work of Mien Ruys – should be on every gardener's book list, offering a thorough insight into the work of an extraordinary woman whose influence lives on through the work of many designers, including Piet Oudolf. Crawford writes: "Whether it's a name we are aware of or not, many of us will have a little bit of Mien in our gardens, be it a railway sleeper, a diagonal line, a *Phlomis russeliana* or a water ball." **AG**

THE PLANT SOCIETY DESIGN HANDBOOK: A PLANT STYLIST'S GUIDE TO CREATING BEAUTIFUL LIVING SPACES
by Jason Chongue
Murdoch Books, £25
ISBN 978-1922616791

The designer and plant curator shows how to combine a love of houseplants with an interest in interior design. Chongue's easy-to-follow blueprints take a design-first approach, focusing on how plants relate to the surrounding architecture, materials and environment. The advice on analysing your space, suggested room layouts and style fundamentals, including colour, texture, shape and scale, is complemented by care advice for more than 80 favourite plants, and inspiring photography. **VP**

THE TULIP GARDEN: GROWING AND COLLECTING SPECIES, RARE AND ANNUAL VARIETIES
by Polly Nicholson and
Andrew Montgomery
Phaidon, £29.95
ISBN 978-1838667689

As an organic flower grower and florist, Nicholson has a reputation for discerning cuttings and arrangements. In her Wiltshire garden at Blackland House, she is indulging a passion for tulips with a thoughtful and methodical approach, all of which has been distilled in this, her debut book. Starting with their cultural and historical influence, Nicholson goes on to feature wild, species, heritage, English Florists and indeed those questionable annual tulips, giving us inspiration and tips for each type. **SE**


SHROUDED IN LIGHT
NATURALISTIC PLANTING INSPIRED BY WILD SHRUBLANDS
KEVIN PHILIP WILLIAMS & MICHAEL GUIDI
The Garden Against Time
IN SEARCH OF A COMMON PARADISE
OLIVIA LAING

THE ACCIDENTAL GARDEN: GARDENS, WILDERNESS, AND THE SPACE IN BETWEEN
by Richard Mabey
Profile Books, £12.99
ISBN 978-1805220701

Over ten chapters, Mabey explores what it means to plant things, vegetations, ideas, people and places. These are wide-ranging debates that cover the gender-fluid nature of plants, decolonisation, migration, native/non-native, reparations for nature through the lens of the wood, the lawn, the pond and the flowerbed. There are times in these discussions where you feel he might not negotiate the hot coals of such topics. But don't be fooled. By the end of each chapter he has succinctly, neatly wrapped up the deal. **AF**

SHROUDED IN LIGHT: NATURALISTIC PLANTING INSPIRED BY SHRUBLANDS
by Kevin Philip Williams and Michael Guidi
Filbert Press, £40
ISBN 978-1739903954

Every now and again, maybe once in a decade, a genuinely revolutionary garden book comes along. This is one. It is not about individual shrubs (garden centre-type things, with big, plastic labels) but shrubs collectively. A lot of us are commenting on how we need to re-engage with woody plants, largely ignored by the 'New Perennial' movement. This is an important book that looks at shrub communities around the world, and how we might interpret them for garden and landscape use. **NK**

Turn the page for
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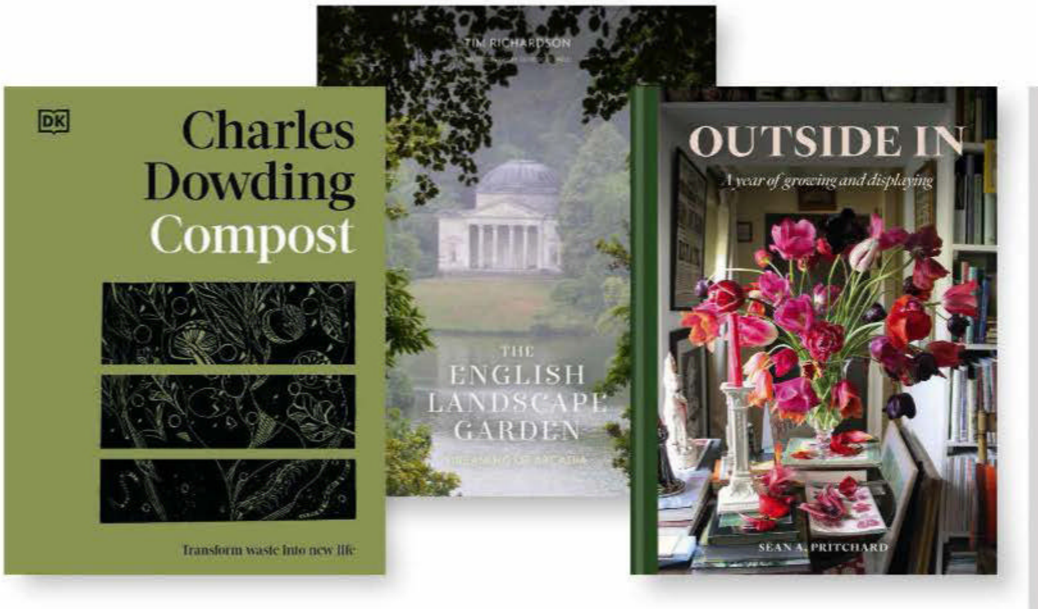
all 14 books ▷

BOOKS OF THE YEAR


DK
Charles Dowding
Compost
Transform waste into new life
TIM RICHARDSON
THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE GARDEN
DREAMING OF ARCADIA
OUTSIDE IN
A year of growing and displaying
SEAN A. PRITCHARD

THE GARDEN AGAINST TIME: IN SEARCH OF A COMMON PARADISE
by Olivia Laing
Picador, £20
ISBN 978-1529066678

In the summer of 2020, just as the first lockdown of the Covid pandemic started to lift, writer Olivia Laing and their husband, the poet Ian Patterson, moved into the former home in Suffolk of Mark Rumary, director of landscaping for many years at Notcutts. Mr Rumary's cobwebbed apron still hung on the potting shed door, and the overgrown garden was packed with unusual delights. As Olivia set about restoring it, they found themselves considering the idea of paradise and gardens, both real and imagined. **VP**

COMPOST: TRANSFORM WASTE INTO NEW LIFE
by Charles Dowding
DK, £14.99
ISBN 978-0241661543

A companion to Charles Dowding's guide to his signature growing method *No Dig* (DK, 2022). While there have been chapters on compost in most of the books the no-dig guru has written, he has never majored in the subject. "My aim with the book was to set composting out in clear terms – I don't want to give readers a recipe, I want them to understand what they're doing so that they can find a method that works for them," he says. **VP**

THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE GARDEN: DREAMING OF ARCADIA
by Tim Richardson
Frances Lincoln, £40
ISBN 978-0711290921

This sumptuous book claims to be the 'first ever large-format book to be published on the 18th-century landscape garden' – but is there anything new to say about this quintessentially British creation, with rolling hills, forest clumps, mirror-flat lakes, grazing Longhorn cows and eye-catching monoliths and temples, so typically created by 'Capability' Brown and William Kent? There is. This book has reignited my interest in the gardens of the 18th century and it will do the same for you. **SP**

OUTSIDE IN: A YEAR OF GROWING AND DISPLAYING
by Sean A Pritchard
Mitchell Beazley, £30
ISBN 978-1784728854

Featuring ideas that are inventive and charming and don't require oodles of blooms, garden designer Pritchard shares how he grows, harvests and artfully arranges flowers and foliage from the garden of his bohemian Somerset cottage all year round. Organised by season, the book shows you how to plan a garden so that every month of the year there's something to bring indoors and display, no matter the size of your plot or your level of horticultural experience. **VP**

- Reviews by Sorrel Everton (SE), Alys Fowler (AF), Annie Guilfoyle (AG), Noel Kingsbury (NK), Stephen Parker (SP), Veronica Peerless (VP) and Cleve West (CW).

WIN ALL 14 OF OUR BOOKS OF THE YEAR

We have one set of all 14 of our top books from 2024 to give away. Test your knowledge to win.

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ONE GARDEN AGAINST THE WORLD
The Garden Against Time OLIVIA LAING PICADOR
A Year Full of Pots Sarah Raven
Carol Klein HORTOBIOGRAPHY
A Flower Garden for Pollinators Rachel de Thame
Mien Ruys The Mother of Modernist Gardens
the plant society design handbook
OUTSIDE IN
The Tulip Garden
THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE GARDEN
SHROUDED IN LIGHT
PASTORAL

TO ENTER

For your chance to win, scan the QR code with your phone camera, or go to **gardensillustrated.com/bookscompetition2024**, and complete your entry. You'll need to answer the following question:

Designer Mien Ruys, who is the subject of Julia Crawford's excellent biography (see page 107), created a famous garden in which Dutch village?

a) Amstelveen
b) Dedemsvaart
c) Hummelo

CLOSING DATE
31 January 2025*

*All entries must be received by 11.59pm on 31 January 2025. To enter you must be over 18 and resident in the UK, including the Channel Islands.
Full terms and conditions can be found at gardensillustrated.com/bookscompetition2024

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Based at the Chelsea Physic Garden, this course offers a thorough overview of Garden Design, ideal for aspiring professionals and passionate amateurs. Lead by architect turned garden designer Catriona Rowbotham, students will be taken step by step through site surveying, using the grid, horizontal and vertical features, garden layouts and planting plans, costing and specification, plus drawing tuition and homework on design and plant portfolios. Guest lecturers are among the top garden designers and horticulturalists in the field and many of our diploma students have gone on to build successful businesses and showcase their work at prestigious RHS Flower Shows.

(2 days a week (Wed & Thur) 10.30am-3.15pm plus 2 days homework)

GARDENING FOR BEGINNERS
April 2025

One of our most popular courses, led by master horticulturalist Ben Pope, which aims to take each student through all the practical elements of caring for a garden from soil, tools, maintenance, seed sowing and propagating, weed control and pests and diseases. The first 3 days will be spent with lectures at the Chelsea Physic Garden and the final day will be spent gaining practical experience in Rosemary Alexander's much praised garden near Petersfield. Participants will be given a chance to prune, plant, sow seeds and regular maintenance tasks will be discussed. A light lunch and refreshments will be provided daily.

ONE YEAR GOOD GARDENING DIPLOMA
September 2025 – beginning July 2026

Allows students to rethink their own garden while training in the more serious aspects of horticultural techniques. Practical sessions held at Arundel Castle under the guidance of head gardener Martin Duncan and at Sandhill Farm House, Rogate. Lectures by many leading gardening personalities and regular visits to exclusive private gardens. Students also learn to draw up planting plans.

(1 day a week (Tues) 10.30am–3.15pm over three terms)

GARDEN DESIGN & CARING FOR YOUR GARDEN
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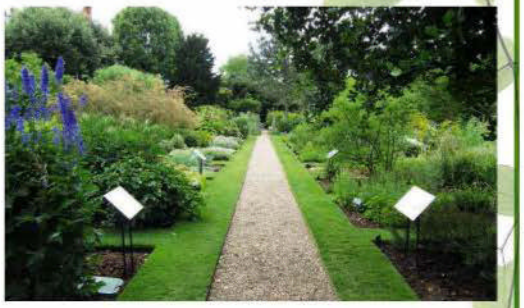
A stepping stone to a new career. These two correspondence courses are a step by step guide to either designing your own garden or learning how to plant and maintain an existing garden: drawing up plans, hard landscaping, site analysis, planting, month by month tasks etc. Taught through a comprehensive course book, with projects submitted to us. *(1-3 years to complete and individual assessment)*

"Thank you for a really inspirational and life changing year"



Garden of Medicinal Plants – Chelsea Physic Garden Photo: R Alexander

Not sure which Diploma course is for you? We prefer potential students to attend an Information Session where the whole course is explained and you can see our work space. For the Essential Garden Design Diploma, video call information sessions are also available.

CONTACT US TO SET UP A DATE & TIME

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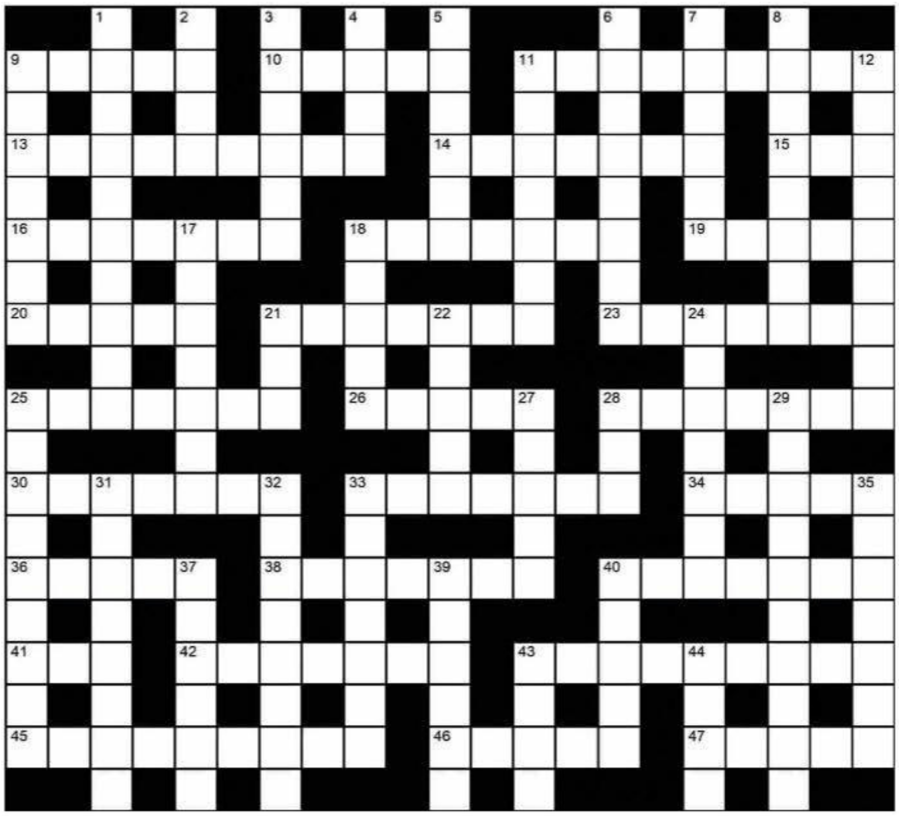
Christmas crossword

Test your horticultural word skill in our bumper Christmas crossword



ACROSS

9 A yellow, deciduous azalea – different, amigo! (5)

10 Plantain lily genus: 'Christmas Tree' has chartreuse-edged green leaves (5)

11 Compact fuchsia with capsicum-like flower buds (6,3)

13/5 down *Schlumbergera* plant, blooming prickly at this time of year! (9,6)

14 A *T. greigii* orange-red tulip with sturdy stems – it's big in Ontario! (7)

15 Polytunnel plastic material … initially protects Virginia creeper (3)

16 A named green *Hakonechloa macra* turning red in autumn – upset soil can (7)

18 Percy, breeder of dwarf rhododendrons – one of three Christmas kings? (7)

19 Weeds of genus *Rumex* found near nettles? (5)

20 ___ Pagels, a top 20th-century plant breeder – trapped in fern's tendrils (5)

21 Jerusalem sage genus – polish off around start of month (7)

23 Rare, historic tulip cultivar with gold/brown petals – spoilt on a slab (7)

25 Group of large-flowering *Hippeastrum* – a gem! (7)

26 First name of garden designer Price and garden writer/presenter Raven (5)

28 Large type of mangetout – swap one around (4,3)

30 Genus of 'Cockscomb' plants – 'Solace', I cultivated (7)

33 *Brassica* relative has seedlings commonly served with cress (7)

34 Aromatic resin from a tree in genus *Commiphora* – gift from a wise man? (5)

36 Treated eg garden tools for rust protection (5)

38 Red-flowering crab apple variety – 'Reindeer'? (7)

40 Pyramidal shape of a rudbeckia's flower centre – sort of laconic (7)

41 A dwarf rose-pink rhododendron – a Snow White helper? (3)

42 One common name for *Colchicum autumnale* – 'Arriviste'? (7)

43 Tall, spiky-flowered plant … happy to start with (9)

45 Genus of milkweed, as special variation (9)

46 Ivy's partner at this time of year? (5)

47 A named *Miscanthus* with arching silky-red plumes – 'Porcelain' (5)

DOWN

1 A genus of pitcher plants – are arnica, strangely! (10)

2 Cuts off branches (4)

3 Genus of labiate, aromatic plants … in healthy muscari (6)

4 *Agapanthus* with tubular blue flowers – 'Thames at Oxford' (4)

5 See 13 across

6 _____ *capreolata*, crossvine – in a bog in distress (8)

7 Nut from *Prunus dulcis* used in marzipan (6)

8 Sort of plant that requires hothouse conditions in the UK (8)

9 Frank needs this aromatic tree resin for a Magi's gift (7)

11 Flat-headed flower clusters … damaged by corms (7)

12 A genus of hairy-trunked tree ferns … is in a dock, oddly (9)

17 Genus of stone-like succulents – ruins his plot! (7)

18 Droops like an over-watered plant? (5)

21 Legume's seed container (3)

22 The mulberry genus – found in Belgium or USA (5)

24 Named cornflower with double white flowers – formed after a wintry fall? (7)

25 Genus of creeping plant silver nickel vine – and orchid, oddly (9)

27 Shrub of *Erica* genus (5)

28 Piece of turf (3)

29 Genus of florist's cineraria – call *Pieris* otherwise! (10)

31 A compact geranium with large, pale purple-pink veined flowers (5,3)

32 Genus of creeping bent grass – it sags or breaks! (8)

33 Apple-like fruits of *Mespilus*, best eaten when decaying (7)

35 The snowdrop tree genus – Sheila A excited (7)

37 Stone fruits of eg cherries, prunes cooked (6)

39 Chinese fruit tree in sunlit Chiswick! (6)

40 Blue-flowering aromatic labiate of *Salvia* genus – right inside a heavy soil (5)

43 *Hypericum* x *moserianum*, ___ flower – a precious Xmas gift from 18 across? (4)

44 *Tradescantia*'s common name is __ plant … in mountain chain (4)

SOLUTIONS TO THIS MONTH'S CROSSWORD WILL BE PRINTED IN THE JANUARY ISSUE

SOLUTIONS TO NOVEMBER'S CROSSWORD

ACROSS 1 Nigella **5** Thrift **8** Edda **9** Globe **10** Silk **11** Phalaris **13** Sweep **14** Spades **16** Air plant **18** Korresia **21** St Paul **23** Resin **25** Rutaceae **28** Vinca **29** Toto **31** Aspera **32** Amateur.

DOWN 1 Nod **2** Gnarled **3** Lager **4** Aloysia **5** Trees **6** Russell **7** Filipendula **12** Hippocrepis **15** SGS **17** RHS **19** Rosette **20** Aurinia **22** Picotee **24** Nivea **26** Tiara **30/27** Tar spot.

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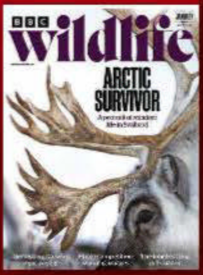
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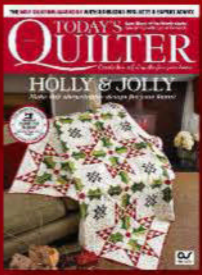
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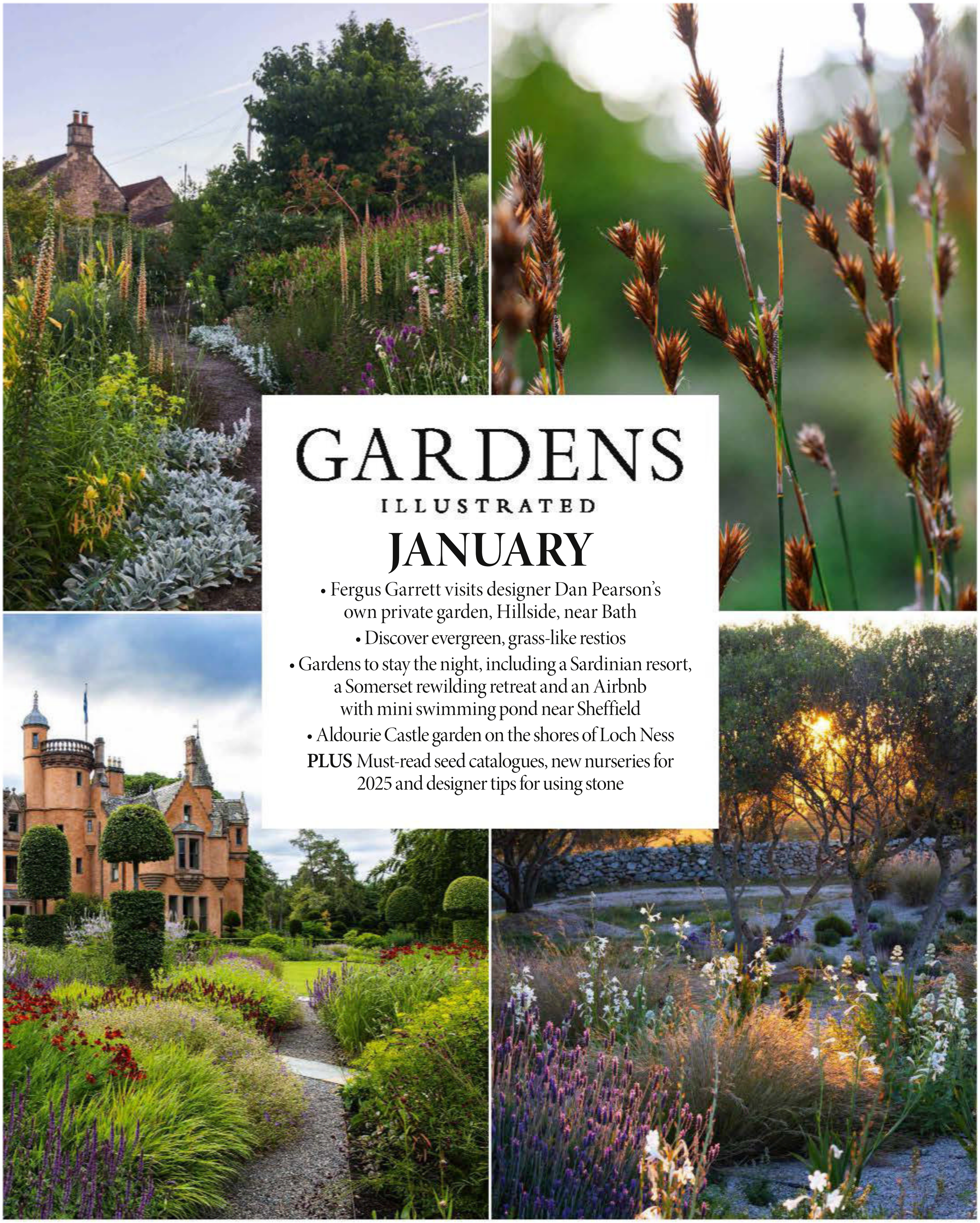

GARDENS ILLUSTRATED

JANUARY

- Fergus Garrett visits designer Dan Pearson's own private garden, Hillside, near Bath
- Discover evergreen, grass-like restios
- Gardens to stay the night, including a Sardinian resort, a Somerset rewilding retreat and an Airbnb with mini swimming pond near Sheffield
- Aldourie Castle garden on the shores of Loch Ness

PLUS Must-read seed catalogues, new nurseries for 2025 and designer tips for using stone

ANDREW MONTGOMERY, JASON INGRAM, RICHARD BLOOM, CLAIRE TAKACS

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THE VALUE OF A GARDENER?

Good gardens are constantly evolving, so why, asks gardener **Colin Stewart**, do people place more value on their initial design than on their ongoing care?

ILLUSTRATION ROSANNA MORRIS

What makes a great garden? It's a big question. But when I think of my true favourites, the thing they have in common is a personal vision, endlessly pondered over, enriched and revised over time. There are the likes of Charlotte Molesworth's garden at Balmoral Cottage in Kent, its disarmingly informal, lighter-than-air topiary, a decades-long labour of love. Or Andy Salter's plot not far away, a passion project of strong colours and textural contrasts around a storybook cabin, enveloped by an expanding meadow. Salter has arranged his working life in TV to accommodate maximum gardening time. My neighbour Fred's terraced-house yard is up there too; a postage stamp he toils in most days, impossibly stuffed with dahlias on begonias on chrysanthemums. In short, my favourite gardens are those that are adored.

A garden requires an ongoing relationship; it mustn't be seen as finished at the point of handover

Recently, I've begun gardening in a different realm – 'high-end' private gardens. These spaces, designed and planted at substantial initial expense, pose the question of how to imbue that well-loved atmosphere – the spiritual life, if you like, beyond the outdoor sofa – when their owners will rarely, because of time, expertise or inclination, be physically involved in their ongoing care. As the gardener, you're at a great advantage if the landscape designer was wise enough to realise and impart to the client that an important part of a garden's beauty lies not only in regular care, but in its mutability. Nothing is more stultifying (and futile) than attempting to preserve a scene in stasis for years on end.

Sarah Price, whose projects I've been lucky enough to care for, understands the importance of dynamism. Designing in time as well as space, her layered, ever-changing plantings gently demand nuanced interventions from the gardener. It's no coincidence that she is a keen experimental gardener in her own right. Among the Chelsea Flower Show's smoke and mirrors, her romantic 2023 show garden of ochre-washed walls and off-coloured annuals felt like a real garden with soul. What moved me most was the midweek pile of deadheaded Benton irises discreetly deposited under a table. Far from shattering the illusion, this confirmed the sense of a gardener's garden.

'Low-maintenance' schemes have long been a key selling point for designers, but the term can be misleading. Place maker Jo McKerr distinguishes between 'low maintenance' and 'low intervention' – which does not mean a way of gardening that is easier, or even less-time consuming, despite the absence of to-do lists and prescribed maintenance regimes. Dan Pearson is equally unequivocal when it comes to the importance of the right people taking on his projects. He believes the Tokachi Millennium Forest in Japan wouldn't be what it is without the knowledge, application and eye of departing head gardener Midori Shintani.

Hearteningly, there's a growing breed of sensitive gardeners-cum-designers who see little hierarchy between the two, among them Matt Wright, Marc O'Neill, Susanna Grant and Charlie Chase. As Charlie says, "Whereas typically a garden designer would look at planting as the end of a job, I see this as the beginning of a relationship that can only deepen with continued focus, care and risk-taking." In other words, gardening. Another garden maker I know charges the same day rate for practical horticulture as design work – an approach that's almost unheard of. But why? Yes, designers are likely to possess qualifications and skills gardeners lack – but the reverse is also true.

I've lost count of the times I've explained what I do and been met with surprise that I'm 'just a gardener', from people in the industry who really should know better. Many who choose this career condemn themselves to precarious existences. In common with other caring professions, hands-on gardening has long been undervalued.

A great garden requires an ongoing relationship: unlike a glossy kitchen extension, it mustn't be seen as finished at the point of handover. Aftercare should never be an afterthought. This may mean shifting the balance so that garden owners expect to invest less in the initial design and more in their gardener, as well as shifting the conversation so it is understood how crucial it is to have a good one.

No matter how talented the designer, a great garden requires time to achieve its potential. Time, and a gardener trusted to think deeply and creatively about it over the long term, experimenting and bringing out its magic. In essence, to love it. ❑

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